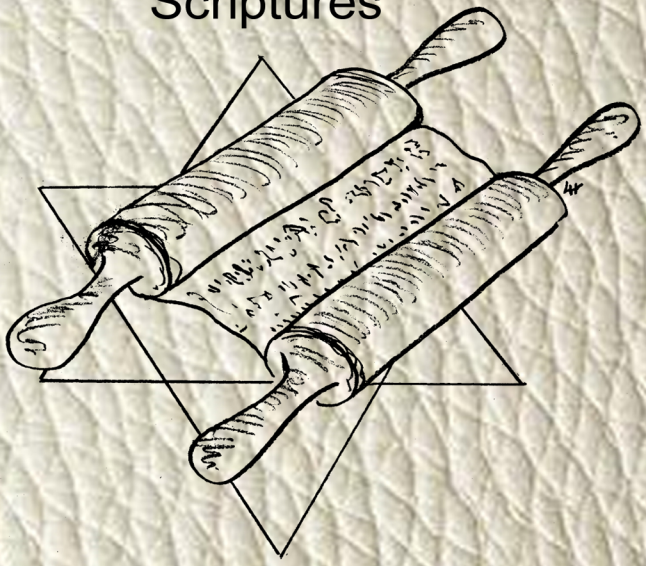
The Gospel According to Moses - and Others

A Daily Devotional About Jesus Christ as Seen in the Hebrew Scriptures



By
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A Word to the Reader

It has been said that if you read the Hebrew Scriptures and do not see Jesus in them, then you have not read the Hebrew Scriptures. In John 5:39 Jesus told the religious leaders: "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me"*[1]. The Scriptures to which Jesus refers are what we call the Old Testament. But where does the Old Testament testify about Jesus? Many people see the Old Testament only as a gruesome account of a vengeful God punishing people. Even Christians who are familiar with it see Jesus in only a few select passages that refer, for example, to His being born of a virgin in Bethlehem (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2), or as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53).

The purpose of this devotional is to seek Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures. Each day's reading will explore a different aspect of the life and ministry of Christ as revealed in the Old Testament – not only His incarnation, ministry and suffering, but also His heavenly intercession and His second coming at the end of the age. There is no Old Testament book that does not contain Jesus, and I have found it convenient to place the readings in order of their location in the Scriptures. In other words, I have started in Genesis and ended with Malachi. However, I do not claim to have covered every Messianic reference there is.

Clarification must be made between those passages that the New Testament writers directly apply to Christ, and those which foreshadow, or anticipate, Christ, but which are not quoted in the New Testament. This devotional is not limited to the former, but includes many passages in which the nature and work of the Messiah are by allusion or by object lesson. The inclusion of a passage which is not directly quoted in the New Testament leaves room for a degree of subjectivity in its inclusion. Therefore there are some passages which may be seen by some, but not by me, as referring to Christ, and

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[1]All Bible references, except where noted, are from the *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

others I have included which some readers may think should not have been.

I have selected eight categories of reference to the Messiah, not based on the work of systematic theologians, but simply for convenience. Each category is labelled A-H at the top of the page. Bearing in mind that there is a degree of subjectivity in this order, I have labelled the references as follows:

A. Direct Old Testament references to a divine Being
B. Passages Jesus used to claim His divinity
C. Passages quoted in the New Testament as fulfilled in Jesus
D. Prophetic passages fulfilled in Jesus
E. Christ-types as shown in people, places, events, objects
F. Historical parallels between Israel the nation and Jesus' life
G. Gospel themes that recur throughout the Old Testament
H. Passages that allude to, or echo, Christ and His ministry

I have provided two indexes. The first lists each reading in the order in which it is found in this book, the second lists the readings by category in order from A to H. The references in the second index may be listed more than once because some readings contain multiple reference types.

When the risen Christ joined two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus, He began with Moses and opened to their minds His place in the Hebrew scriptures. That would have been some Bible study. I sincerely hope that these pages deepen your understanding and strengthen your confidence in God and His Word as you too join those two disciples on Emmaus Road.

February 2022

January 1 **The Man on the Back (B)**

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me…John 5:39.

A story is told of some children who, when given a large and complex jigsaw puzzle, completed it effortlessly in no time at all. When asked how they were able to do it so quickly, one of them replied, "It was easy, we just turned over the pieces and did the man on the back".

In some ways the Bible is like that jigsaw puzzle. To many, the Bible is a wandering and baffling record of a despotic deity's dealings with an ill-fated nation. Yet if we turn the pieces over we will see that they contain the shape of a Man. And when we start to assemble the pieces we soon discover that the Man on the back is the Messiah, the world's Redeemer.

The Redeemer is found throughout the Bible. In prophecy and promise, in type and shadow, in echo and allusion, in people, in places, in objects, in events, all of which anticipate the life and character of One to come who will restore mankind to God's image. There is no book in which He is not found at all. Even *Song of Solomon* will take us by surprise.

When Jesus said that the Scriptures testify of Him, He was claiming to be the Man on the back. The next 365 pages of this book will search out and explore this claim. Some passages, such as Daniel 9:25-27 and Micah 5:2, are direct prophecies. Some follow themes as, for example, that of the Seed, first mentioned in Genesis 3:15, which reveals Satan's frantic yet fruitless efforts to prevent the Redeemer's arrival. Other passages reveal Him in the lives of the great men and women of faith, and yet others reveal shadows cast by the True. With so much testimony in evidence, it is hard to escape the final conclusion, that Jesus is who He claimed to be. There is no doubt about it; He *is* the Man on the back.

January 2 **Jesus and Genesis (G)**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Genesis 1:1-4.

The Bible was given us to 'train us in righteousness' (2Timothy 3:16). The instruction we gain from studying its sacred pages is the wisdom that God intends all mankind to own. In His love He has given us great knowledge in the fields of science and medicine to bring a blessing to the world, but it is the things of God that are His heart's desire for us to know, and these are available, through the Scriptures, to old and young, great and small, rich and poor. The things of God concern salvation, and salvation requires a Saviour, and knowledge of the Saviour is found in the Bible. Therefore when we study the Bible correctly it is the Saviour we will discover, and when we find the Saviour in the Bible we can know we are studying it correctly.

The Saviour is also revealed in the Creation narrative, which is packed full of instruction in righteousness. To the Lord's dismay, when we read that narrative we often miss this instruction because we get sidetracked with issues such as how long ago it happened and how long the process took. But these matters are not God's first reason for the Creation narrative. He wishes us to see in it the Saviour and His plan for our salvation. To put it another way, Genesis is not about geology it is about Jesus.

The purpose of this devotional is to seek Jesus, and we will find Him in the Creation account just as clearly as in the rest of Genesis. Over the next few days we shall seek Him in the first four verses of the Bible, and we shall be well rewarded with our discovery.

January 3 **In the Beginning (H)**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1.

Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, chose to open his account of beginnings with the words, *In the beginning God.* These words are loaded with implication. They state that God – one God - existed before anything else existed, and that heaven and earth were created by this one God. He is its Designer and Maker. He is not a part of it, but external to it. No part of it exists independently of God, but all is governed by His creative power. Subsequent verses expand God's creative power beyond the planet to include the entire solar system, and indeed the universe (v.16).

Given the significance of these opening words of Moses, it is simply astounding that fifteen hundred years later, a man called John would use almost identical words to open his book about Jesus. *In the beginning was the Word.* Why would John do such a thing unless he was absolutely convinced in his mind that the One he called *The Word,* Jesus, was absolutely God, and that *The Word* was the Creator of the heavens and the earth? Maybe John would have used different wording had he written his Gospel in Hebrew instead of Greek. But then the Hebrew Bible was available in Greek when John wrote his Gospel, and John chose the same words that the Greek Bible used: *en archē* – in the beginning.

When John opened His Gospel with the same words as Moses he was stating right up front just who Jesus was. Even though it would be considered by his numerous adversaries as outright blasphemy, he wanted all who read his Gospel to understand clearly that this Jesus was God in human flesh: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made"* (John 1:1-3).

January 4 **Water and Spirit (H)**

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:2.

Everything is dark. There is no light anywhere. And yet something is there; water is there. In what appearance we do not know except that we will read that there are two waters, both together as one (v6). God's law of gravity leads the liquid to settle and the vapour to rest above the liquid. Moses seems to be starting his narrative with a water world, an aquatic world with an atmosphere heavy with moisture. A globe presumably, entirely covered in water. Perhaps the waters are at rest, tranquil, one vast serene mist-covered ocean like a still mountain lake on a crisp morning. Perhaps they rage; eddying, whirling, and tumbling, as it were, like gargantuan waterfalls thundering into a bottomless abyss. There is no light to know. What are these waters? Are they lifeless brine? Or are they living like that which flowed from Moses' rock?

But wait! There is something else in the darkness: not seen, but sensed. It is a Presence, a divine Breath, moving across the waters. The waters are not alone, for the Spirit of God hovers above them. Something is about to happen! God is about to speak!

In the Bible water is often associated with beginnings. The Israelites will begin their nationhood when the Red Sea parts to make way for them. The Jordan River will also part for them as they enter the Promised Land. The Messiah will announce His earthly ministry from the waters of the same river when, as a humble Nazarene, He will descend into the waters of baptism. As He arises from the water the Spirit of God will again descend, this time in the form of a dove, to hover above the waters. And again God will speak. As at Creation, so at Redemption, Life begins when the Spirit of God hovers over the face of the waters and God speaks.

January 5 **Let there Be Light (H)**

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Genesis 1:3.

And God said.... Is this when Creation week officially begins? Is it a formal announcement from the voice of God? Is it with the coming of Light?[2] What is this Light which divides day from night, but is not the sun because that is not created until the fourth day (v.14-19)? The Light is God Himself. God has come to the world, "*for God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1John 1:5). As it will be in the New Earth, so the world has no need yet of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminates it (Revelation 21:23). God came to the world in Light, and the world eagerly received the Light, delighting to heed its voice, bringing night and day each in its turn. And God saw the Light, and saw that the world obeyed the Light, and saw that it was good.

Yet it was not to remain good. Four thousand sin-filled years later the world was again in darkness. Again God's Spirit hovered over the water, this time at the Jordan River. Again God spoke. Again Light came into the world. This time the Light was "*The Word*, *and in Him was life...and the light shone in the darkness"* (John 1:4-5). But this time the darkness neither comprehended the Light nor gladly received it, but was unable to stand in its way[3].

Yet this time, as at the first, when God saw the Light, He saw that it was good, for not everyone was of the world. Faithful men and women, at first only a few, took up the light, and bore it bravely where it led them. The world tried its best, using every dark and hateful means under the sun, to extinguish the Light, but it could not, for it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, He was the One who shone into men's hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2Corinthians 4:6).

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[2] I do not wish to become embroiled in controversy about the Gap Theory, so I just ask the question. Some people see a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, which is unspecified in length. There are many references in the Scriptures to Creation occurring at the command of God. Therefore it is consistent with the text that Creation Week began with "*And God said*" and the arrival of Light.

[3] The word 'comprehended' is better translated 'overcame', which alters the sense of the passage to mean that the darkness was not able to extinguish the light. Commentators are divided on the correct interpretation.

January 6 **The Light and the Life (A)**

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Genesis1:3-4.

Like Moses, there are times when we seem to stand on holy ground, and must remove our shoes. Sometimes we seem to be entering where we have no right to enter. Shall we, like Moses, see the revelation of God as a curiosity? Or shall we, like a wiser Moses, understand that "*By those who come near to me I must be regarded as holy"* (Leviticus 10:3). Genesis 1:3 seems to be such a time. When Light first fell upon the water world, it was not from the sun or moon, for they were not yet created. This Light was God Himself, *for "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (1John 1:5). This Light divided the light from the darkness. We do not understand that, but we see it again dividing light from darkness when it came between the Israelites and the Egyptians on the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:20). To the Israelites it was light; to the Egyptians it was darkness.

Many centuries later the Light again burst through the darkness. This time the Light was a Man who said*, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). This Man taught us that the light equates to life, so that when God said, "*Let there be light"*, life also came to the world. Without light there is no life; the Israelites in the light lived, the Egyptians in the darkness perished.

Now the world is again in darkness through unbelief. But those who do believe are the light of the world. As the moon reflects the sun, so the believer reflects Light and Life into the darkness of the long night so that it might be fulfilled which was written: "*The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter…when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people…"* (Isaiah 30:26).

January 7 **Darkness & Light (H)**

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Genesis1:3-4.

As we read earlier, the first light that came to the world was God, for God is Light. Perhaps we can see it as God visiting the world – coming to prepare it to be His new home. When the Creation was complete, it was the Garden of Eden in which He chose to walk so that He could enjoy the work of His hands and the company of man.

Tragically, man chose a different path, and God no longer walks in the cool of Eden's day. As the curse strengthened its grip on the world, the image of God in man became so defaced that God would later commence a reversal of Creation and reunite the waters above with the waters below (1:6-7) so that again waters covered the surface of the deep.

Jesus prophesied that when He returned at the end of the age conditions would again be as they were at that time. That we are now in those times is quite evident to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Soon we will see – maybe have already started seeing – a reversal of Creation as God undoes what He had originally made so well. According to Revelation 16 we will see plagues being poured out upon the created elements: the air, the sea, the sun, and the wildlife, until finally the world is again in darkness (16:10).

But the story does not end in darkness, for God will recreate the heavens and the earth, which will become the eternal home of those who have walked in the Light. God will again dwell among them and will again walk in the cool of Eden's day. As He did in the beginning, God will again say *"Let there be light",* and there will be Light, again not from the sun or the moon, but because the glory of God will illuminate it and Jesus the Lamb will be its Light (Revelation 21:23).

January 8 **And God Rested (H)**

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. Genesis 2:1-3.

As the sun gently dropped toward the horizon on the sixth day of creation, the Creator surveyed His work and was satisfied. He had created a world, He had put life on the world, and He was pleased with what He saw for it was perfect and holy. The record says, "*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good..."* (Genesis 1:31).

This passage anticipates another time when God's work would be finished, and again He would rest on the Sabbath day. Of the multitude of God's great works on man's behalf, there are two which stand out among them all: Creation and Redemption. He is our Creator and our Redeemer, therefore it is natural that as He entered into a Sabbath rest after the work of Creation, so He should rest after His work of Redemption. Jesus' last proclamation from the cross was, *"It is finished".* What was finished? The plan of redemption was finished because the Lamb of God had now been sacrificed. There was no more that could be done for the sinner.

As Jesus died, a sixth-day sun was also dropping toward the horizon, and the Scriptures tell us that His followers laid His body in a tomb and then *"…rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment"* (Luke 23:50-56). Thus for both these grand events there is a declaration of completion followed by a Sabbath rest. There will be a third grand event – the Glorification – when the redeemed of the ages are raised and sin is no more. On that day too God will say, *"It is Finished",* and there will be a perfect Sabbath rest for God's people.

January 9 A Man, a Garden, and a Tree (E)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." Genesis 2:15-17.

A man, a garden, and a tree! The man is the first Adam. The garden is his paradise home. The tree will teach the innocent man the difference between good and evil. Another Man, another garden, and another tree: the man is the last Adam (1Corinthians 15:45), the garden is near Jerusalem, and the tree will enable all heaven and earth to see the full extent of the difference between good and evil. It was Calvary that fully revealed to the universe the full reality of Lucifer's intention.

Scriptural echo forms a theme that we will run into time and again in our search for the Messiah. It is a guidepost that directs our steps into the path of truth and away from the highways of error. Someone well said, "Those who read the Hebrew Scriptures without seeing Jesus in them have not read the Hebrew Scriptures". It is in these echoes that we see Jesus, and the discerning reader will always be looking for them when reading the Bible.

The echoes are not always evident. It is John the Apostle who provides this detail: "*At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid*" (John 19:41). It is the Apostle Peter who likens the Cross to the tree: "[Christ] *Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree"* (1Peter 2:24 NKJV).[4] The last Adam is meeting the first Adam's sin. "*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous"* (Romans 5:19). The point where man's relationship with God was broken is the point where it had to be restored.

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[4] Some versions, such as the NIV, translate the word 'tree' as 'cross'. However, the Greek word for 'cross', *stauros*, is not used here; it is *xylon*, meaning a tree or piece of timber, as is the case in many references by the Apostles Peter and Paul when they talk of Jesus on a tree.

January 10 **Adam's Brother (H)**

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. Genesis 2:21-22.

Jesus once explained His place in the Scriptures to some forlorn disciples on a walk to Emmaus. The record says He started with Moses, but Moses started with Adam, so maybe Jesus did too. After all, Jesus is referred to as the second Adam (1Corinthians 15:45-49). But, you might ask, what do we learn about Jesus from Adam? More than we think! Let's take a moment to consider how.

Of all men, only Adam and Jesus were given life by means other than by human procreation. Their humanities came about through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, and both had authority we do not have, for example both had dominion over the animals.

More importantly, both were progenitors of God's people, Adam physically and Jesus spiritually. In His loving wisdom, God chose to create Eve from Adam's own body. To do so, He, on the sixth day of Creation, caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, and brought Eve into existence from his flesh. Similarly, when Jesus died, also on the sixth day, He too went into a deep 'sleep', and a spear was thrust into his side, from which flowed blood and water. Why blood and water? Is there a connection between Eve and the blood and water? Deuteronomy 12:23 reminds us that in blood is life. Thus as Eve (meaning *Life*) came from Adam and had the same DNA as him, so when we are born of the Spirit and baptized of water into Christ, we are recreated in Him, and become one with Him; we have His 'DNA'. As Eve was Adam's bride, so we shall be "*prepared as a bride for her Husband...adorned in the robes of His righteousness"* (Isa 61:10; Rev 7:9-14, 21:2).

January 11 **The Second Adam (H)**

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6.

The first Adam, straight from the Creator's hand, had disobeyed God's command against eating the proffered fruit. Now the Second Adam, emaciated in the desert, faced the same tempter and heard the same temptation. For man's sake He must obey, for at the point where man's downfall began, so his redemption must begin. The point at which the relationship with God was broken was the point at which it must be repaired.

By succumbing to appetite, the first Adam had, in effect, acknowledged the right of the Enemy to ownership of this planet. Thus was Satan able to represent planet Earth when the sons of God met before the Lord in the days of Job (Job 1:6-7). Now to perpetuate his evil princedom he must entice the second Adam also to depart from the will of God by succumbing to appetite. If He could get the Son of God to obey him he would be, in effect, god.

In spite of His physical state, Jesus gave the tempter the response that the first son of God should have given all those years before: "*It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4).

With these words Satan's evil princedom received a blow that would ultimately see him exterminated once and for all time. In the meantime, however, these words of Jesus are invaluable for us today. Today's popular culture stresses the value of good *cuisine*, but the Word of God must be a significant part of the menu.

January 12 **A Stricken Heel (D)**

And the LORD God said unto the serpent...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. Genesis 3:14-15.

This is the first recorded promise of a Redeemer to come. The promise is made directly to Satan the snake so that he is in no doubt about his final end. But embedded in this promise is a hint of the price the Redeemer will be willing to pay. Snakebite is often fatal without antivenin, and for the promised Redeemer there would be no antivenin.

Yes, the words were delivered to Satan, but the promise is to fallen man so that he may know that one day Eden will be restored to him. Adam naively assumed that his firstborn son, Cain, was to be the redeemer. How wrong he was!

What anguish is latent in these words; what pathos is hidden in that brief phrase, *you will strike his heel.* In order for such a promise to be made, the contingency for man's disobedience, and the plan for his redemption, must have already been in place. When God placed that tree in the garden, He gave man the freedom to choose not to obey. Without doubt that must have been one of the greatest risks ever taken, or ever will be taken, in the history of the universe.

What a scene must have taken place in heavenly places as the Godhead drew up the blueprint for man's salvation. Was it a light thing for our heavenly Father to allow His beloved Son to pay the price that sin demands? What took place within the courts of heaven as the Son of God presented His plan to redeem us? What struggle took place within the heart of infinite love to agree to such a price? The Son would give His own perfect and holy life that we selfish wretches might occupy heaven. Only eternity will reveal the full depth of God's amazing love!

January 13 **The Seed (D)**

And the LORD God said unto the serpent...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Genesis 3:14-15 KJV.

This passage is crucial to this devotional because it reveals a theme that runs through the entire Bible, that of the Seed. I have used the King James Version because it retains the word 'seed' instead of 'offspring', which, although correct, weakens the passage and causes us to overlook the importance of this theme.

When Satan heard that One would come who would bruise his head, he realised his days as a son of God[5] were numbered. His only recourse was to do everything in his power to destroy the Seed – the Messiah. He did not, he figured, have to wait until the Messiah arrived. If at any time he could destroy or corrupt, or otherwise interfere with, the lineage of the Messiah, he could alter the course of history in his favour. His first attempt was to destroy Cain, which he did without even having to take a life. His next threat was Abel, and again he succeeded, but this time only by taking life. However, Seth he could not destroy, and the Seed was preserved. From Seth to Noah, and from Noah to Jacob, the lineage remained intact. Of Jacob's sons, it was Judah to whom the birthright fell, and it was through the line of Judah that the Seed was to be carried.

There are some unusual stories in the Biblical account of the Children of Israel, for example Judah's dealings with his daughter-in-law Tamar (see Genesis 38). It is only when seen in the light of God's need to preserve the Seed that stories like this can be understood. The theme of the Seed helps us understand a major truth about the Bible: the Bible is not a book about Israel; it is a book about the Messiah. Israel is the vehicle through which the Messiah is to come, but the Messiah is the theme of the Book.

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[5] Although the Bible does not state it directly, there is no reason Earth should be the only world God has created. If other worlds were created before Earth, we can safely assume they are unfallen (the 99 unlost sheep?). Job Chapters 1 and 2 describe a meeting which may well be of these world representatives. If so, the term 'son of God' refers to those beings who were the leaders of the created worlds, and who represented their world at heavenly councils. Adam was originally the son of God representing earth (see Luke 3:38), but he lost that right to Satan when he sinned. The New Testament frequently refers to the redeemed as sons of God, not by creation but by adoption. Who knows, perhaps they too will represent worlds in the kingdom.

January 14 Of Women, Serpents and Seeds (D)

And the LORD God said unto the serpent...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Genesis 3:14-15 KJV.

There are three players in this drama: the serpent, the woman, and her Seed. The plot for the drama is the enmity between the serpent and the Seed. We know who the three players are, and barely a devotional day will go by without our seeing the plot unravelling as the serpent seeks to find ways to destroy or corrupt the Seed.

We might be forgiven for assuming that Jesus' victory at Calvary would have led the serpent to throw in the towel. After all, the universe has seen him unmasked, it has seen his rage as he whipped up the crowd into a frenzy of hatred toward the suffering Christ. Now all of heaven has seen its beloved Leader's infinite love played out to its end so that mankind might be set free from sin. It has seen Jesus "treated as we deserve so that we might be treated as He deserves".[6]

But this serpent has an ego without equal. If he is not to be prince of this world, then he will set out to make sure that nobody is prince of this world; he will destroy the world before seeing it taken from him. *"Woe to the earth and the sea,"* wrote John, "*because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short"* (Revelation 12:12).

This quote is important because Revelation 12 is the only other place in the Bible that mentions the three players in the drama of Genesis 3:15. Here the details are provided, and they reveal an unrepentant serpent turning his full fury toward the only ones left for him to hate – the followers of the Lamb, the remnant of His seed. Take a few minutes to read Revelation 12 in its entirety; it's worth the read.

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[6] White, E.G. *Desire of Ages*, Pacific Press, 1898, page 25.

January 15 Of Women, Serpents and Seeds 2 (D)

So the LORD God said to the serpent…"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:14-15.

As mentioned yesterday, Revelation 12 reveals much of the detail implicit in today's reading. There we find a woman, clothed in the sun, her feet on the moon, wearing a crown of twelve stars. A woman in prophetic scriptures represents a community of worshippers, in truth or error, depending upon the description of the woman (see Rev. 14:4, 17:1-6). In this case the crown the woman wears is a *stephanos*, not a *diadema,* suggesting victory rather than royalty. This woman represents the people of God who have overcome the venom of the serpent, and through whom the Seed is carried.

Opposing her is the dragon - the serpent - whose entire strategy to *"become like the Most High"* (Isaiah 14:12-14) hinges upon the destruction of the Seed. His repeated failure to destroy or corrupt the Seed has driven him into a frenzy of rage against the woman, who, from Abel until the worldwide Church, he has tried to obliterate from the face of the earth. But God finds ways of protecting the woman so that there has never been, nor ever will be, a time when faithful servants of Christ, who have loved, protected, and lived by the Word of God, do not exist on earth. These faithful remnants of the Seed, wherever they are, have preserved the Holy Scriptures throughout the darkness of Satan's wrath, and will continue to do so until Christ returns.

According to Revelation 12, there will come a time shortly before Christ returns, when the dragon will go into open warfare against the offspring of the Seed. This will be a time of testing for saints, but the good news is that the dragon will lose that war, and will be finally eradicated for all time. O Lord, haste that day.

January 16 **Adam's Attire (E)**

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. Genesis 3:21.

Leather comes from animals, and the animal has to die in order for its skin to be used as clothing. Would God kill an animal just to clothe someone? What species would He use? How would He kill the animal? The answers to these questions tell the most amazing story of God's love for fallen man, and open our eyes to God's great blueprint for our salvation. Let's picture the scene:

The disgraced pair pitifully try to cover their nakedness with leaves. But the work of our hands can never cover our shame; that is God's work. The Lord God bids Adam to construct an altar. Then, when it is complete, bids him select from his flock the most perfect lamb and lead it to the altar. Then Adam is instructed to do something that appals him to the depths of his soul; he is to take the life of the animal by piercing its carotid artery and allowing the blood to flow from its body.

How could God ask Adam to do such a thing? Because that is how awful sin is. To sin is to disobey what God tells us to do (1John 3:4), and without the shedding of blood there can be no removal of sin (Hebrews 9:22). Painful though it was for Adam, the slain lamb, and the garment he wore from it, became a promise that would later be fulfilled at a place called Calvary. The lamb had no power of its own to forgive sin; it only pointed to a better Sacrifice. For mankind to be redeemed, the blood that was shed had to belong to One infinitely superior, none other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

God used Adam's lamb to provide a garment to cover his nakedness, and the Lamb slain at Calvary will provide a garment for all whose sin has been removed (Rev. 3:18).

January 17 **A Male Child (A)**

Later, Adam had sexual relations with his wife Eve. She became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "I have given birth to a male child—the LORD." Genesis 4:1 (ISV).

I have chosen the International Standard Version for this reading because it comes closest to the exact Hebrew wording. Most versions say "...a male child from the LORD", or "...with the help of the LORD". In fact, the additional words are supplied and were not written by Moses. He wrote, "a male child, Jehovah", or "...a male child, even Jehovah". When 'the LORD' is in capitals it is God's name, Jehovah or Yahweh, which is being used.

This puts a new complexion on Eve's words, and may also give insight into her theological awareness. She had been present when God declared to Satan, *"...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Genesis 3:15). Naturally Eve assumed her new son was He who would crush the serpent's head. In that she was to be sorely disappointed.

Eve may have misunderstood the timing of the promise, but that does not mean she misunderstood the true nature of her future offspring. That Eve should call the Promised One *Jehovah* is astounding. That Moses should record her as saying so is also astounding. It tells us that the common understanding was that when Messiah came He would be none other than the One we call Jehovah – God Himself. Yet, as we read on, we shall see this idea repeated time and again in the Bible. For example, fifteen hundred years after Moses, John the Baptist would say of Jesus, *"This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for Jehovah…"* (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3). John understood that the Man he was preparing the people to meet was none other than Jehovah in the flesh.

January 18 **Abel's Offering (G)**

Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. Genesis 4:4-5.

Why did God accept Abel's offering and not Cain's? Did they not both believe in God? Did they not both build altars? Did they not both give the best they had? Why then was Cain's offering unacceptable? Because it was the fruit of his own labour, and by our own work we can never be justified. It is only by blood that we can be acceptable to God (Rom. 5:9).

Worship is at the heart of the conflict between good and evil. Satan has ever sought to corrupt our worship by counterfeiting the true with the false. Hence, Cain's offering is replicated in all pagan worship, for it seeks to appease God through good works. Abel's offering, on the other hand, was perfected by the presence of the blood, and pointed to the day when the blood of the Son of God would be shed as a full atonement for the sins of the world.

In the last days worship will again be the focus of the final conflict, for Satan will seek to have the entire world worship him (see Revelation 13). Yet God will send messengers around the world in those days to proclaim the call to "*Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water"* (Revelation 14:7).

Who is He who made the world? None other than He who became the world's Redeemer. That makes us twice His, for He made us, and when we were taken hostage, He bought us back. Cain was right in making an offering, but he left out of it that which made it valuable, the blood of the atonement; without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sin (Hebrews 9:22).

January 19 **The Seed (G)**

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed." And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord. Genesis 4:25-26.

In Genesis 4:1 we observed Eve's perceptiveness in the birth of Cain. When she said, *"I have gotten a man, the LORD"* she believed Cain to be the Seed who would crush the serpent's head. For that belief she was to suffer the greatest disappointment, for her son was to become a murderer and a vagabond. Now the one she had assumed to be the Seed was a criminal and his only brother dead. Eve must have wondered how the promise of Genesis 3:15 would be fulfilled.

The serpent had rejoiced when he eliminated both Cain and Abel as Seed-bearers in one strike. When Seth was born Satan knew that every attempt he made to destroy the Seed would meet with frustration. Had his ego permitted it, he would have known there and then that God's plan to redeem mankind could never fail, and that he was doomed. But instead of accepting defeat his narcissistic conceit urged him to ever monstrous acts of frantic hatred. If he could not destroy the Seed, he would make the planet every bit as unbearable for humanity as he possibly could.

When Seth was born, Eve's concern evaporated. Now God had given her another Seed, another man who would crush the serpent's head. This man did not become a murderer, nor was he murdered, but he became the first in a line of godly men who, as the record says, "*began to call on the name of the Lord".* Eve must have realized somewhere along the way that the Seed would not come in her lifetime. Yet perhaps she was still living when Enoch, in the sixth generation from Seth, made his great Messianic prophecy, *"See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones"* (Jude 1:14).

January 20 **A Name in the Names (D)**

He named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed. Genesis 5:29.

Noah means *Comfort,* or *Rest*. Names in the Bible are important. Often they were given to commemorate an event or to describe a character. For that reason an aggrieved Esau said to his father, *"Isn't he rightly named Jacob (deceiver)? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing*" (Genesis 27:36). Thus when we read names in the Bible we can expect that those names were given for a reason. This is especially so for the names given in the genealogy of Genesis 5.

In this genealogy some of the names are explained in the text and some are not. Those explained are, *Adam* – man, *Seth* – appointed, and *Noah* – comfort. Others, although not given us in the text, are established; they are *Enosh* – mortal, *Mahallalel* – blessed God, and *Jared* – to come down. The last four names are harder: *Cainan (Kenan)* is either to possess or to sorrow, *Enoch* – to teach or to dedicate, *Methuselah* – man of the spear or his death shall bring, *Lamech* - to have power or to despair, wild man or strong youth. Bible students have often noticed that these names, depending upon the correct meaning of the last four, tell the story of the Gospel. Loosely applied the names read as follows: Man [is] appointed mortality in sorrow. [But] the blessed God shall come down to teach. His death shall bring the despairing comfort (or shall bring power [and] comfort).

In these meanings we see the plan of salvation in the names of the great pre-flood patriarchs, a promise to those who longed for the reconciliation of all things. Jacob was given a new name, no longer *deceiver*, but *Israel* – God prevails, and so shall all those who prevail; *"you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow"* (Isaiah 62:2).

So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:7-8.

When God looked at what had become of His Creation, He was sorry. Like a potter whose new collection is failing, He chose to do the only respectable thing: to bin it. Yet there was one vessel in the collection He could not bring Himself to destroy; Noah's life was perfect toward God. Because of this one man, God would preserve the planet and provide a way of salvation so that all who believed would not perish. Noah's righteousness saved the world.

It was no easy task for Noah; the salvation of mankind is no small thing, and was not to come without great cost. For 120 years Noah constructed the vessel that would save man and beast, and for 120 years he pled in vain for wayward man to believe. Yet, when the flood came it was only his own who entered the ark. Even those who had been involved in its construction were lost. That could never happen again could it? Surely those who involve themselves in building the church of Christ today will be saved won't they. Won't they? Those who did not enter the ark all perished. But not one of those who entered was lost. Noah safely delivered all God had entrusted to him to their safe haven, even amid the greatest upheaval the world had ever seen.

Maybe Jesus had Noah in mind when He said, *"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me..."* (John 6:39). Noah, whose name means 'Comfort, or Rest', was a type of Him of whom it is written, *"In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious"* (Isaiah 11:10).

This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Genesis 6:9.

Noah is unique. Apart from the Messiah he is the only person to whom we owe our very existence. Had Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and other faithful saints never existed, we may still have been born. Had there been no Noah - nobody who was righteous when God saw that it was time to send humanity back to the dust - human life would have ceased from the earth. We owe much to Noah. When God saw what humans had done with the life given them, He must have also seen something pretty special in Noah that He was willing to take the risk to allow human existence to continue. To be sure, a Redeemer had been promised, but why wait for another two thousand years or more before fulfilling the promise? Why not bring the 'human experiment' to an end now? After all, things were as bad then as they would ever be (Luke 17:26), and there were many by Noah's time to redeem. No, there was something so exceptional about Noah that God could not bear to end man's probation lest there be others who might walk as Noah walked, those without whom heaven's kingdom would not be complete. Only when *they* are no more will all things come to an end. As Jesus said, "*when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8).

Noah is unique; a Christ-type like no other. Like Christ, he built a *mansion* for all who would enter. As Christ welcomed the unclean, so Noah brought the unclean into the ark. As Christ said*, "Come to me and I will give you rest",* so Noah, whose name means *Rest*, invited all to come to him. Like Christ, he was lifted up between heaven and earth (Genesis 7:17; John 12:32). As it will be in the last days, there appeared a delay in the fulfilment of his promise (Genesis 6:3; 2Peter 3:4). Above all it was his righteousness that saved us.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month —on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. Genesis 7:11-12.

This passage gives a major clue as to how God worked during the Flood, and also how He will again work at the end of the age. When God made the earth He started with a water world in which He separated water from water by a vault that He called the heavens. Now God is undoing His Creation, and is returning it to what it was in the beginning. The waters of the deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens are opened. God allows forty days for the earth to return to its original state. Maybe to do it in a single day would be too much for the ark and its precious passengers.

At the end of the age God will again undo His Creation. This process is revealed in Revelation 16 where we see the plagues being poured out upon a world that has again become darkness. A careful study of the last plagues, when placed beside the days of Creation, reveals that the destruction of the earth is in almost the reverse order of Creation. Finally, the record says, *"...Then there came ...a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake...Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found"* (Revelation 16:17-20).

Due to humanity's exploitation and misuse of the planet, it will revert, not to a water world, but to a lake of fire, which will burn until all traces of man's greed are forever removed (Revelation 20:14-15; 2Peter 3:5-12). *"Then*", Peter continues, *"we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells"* (2Peter 3:13).

And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. Genesis 7:17.

When the final events come upon the earth, the conditions will be very similar to Noah's day, and as Noah found refuge in the ark, so God's last-day people will find refuge in the only name under heaven that can save them, Jesus the Messiah.

Noah's ark is more than just a story about a boat; it paints a portrait of Jesus and His love. How? Well, here are some ways: Jesus said*, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Luke 5:32)*.* Is the plan of salvation only for sinless people? God forbid, or there would be none saved. Not just the clean animals, but the unclean: the pigs, the toads and the snakes, were all called to the ark. And no matter how many came, the ark had enough food for them all with plenty to spare. For Jesus said, "*he that comes to Me will never go hungry"* (John 6:35).

Notice also that the door to the ark was closed by the hand of God, not by the hand of man. Which man has the authority to declare us saved or unsaved? In the final phase of the conflict between good and evil, the saved will be sealed by God's own hand, safe from all enemies.

On a quiet hillside one night Jesus spoke these words: *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life"* (John 3:14-15). Similarly, the ark was lifted up on the water between heaven and earth so that all those who were in it would be saved. Just as those in the ark did not perish, we can have perfect assurance that all those who are in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

January 25 **Noah's Covenant (G)**

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you…neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there anymore be a flood to destroy the earth. Genesis 9:8-11 (KJV).

The term *covenant* comes from the word for *cutting*, and refers to a cutting made in the flesh so that blood is shed. Thus there is a play on words in this passage where God effectively says, "I shall establish the cutting of flesh with you so that all flesh will not again be cut off by a flood".

We can now see this covenant process in God's dealing with Adam, for when he and Eve were given skins to wear, animals were cut and their blood shed in order to provide garments for the guilty pair. Thus, as we have seen, the coverings not only provided warmth and modesty, but they symbolised the forgiven couple's new relationship with God.

Now, as the flood waters have abated from the earth, Noah's first act is to build an altar, and sacrifice one of each of the clean animals as an offering to God. Man's first act after leaving the ark was that of shedding blood, and the record says that it was a sweet smell to the Lord. Why? Because by doing so he was fulfilling the covenant in demonstrating his faith in the Redeemer to come.

We will see this covenant revealed time and again in God's dealing with His people, sometimes in ways easy to see, sometimes only by doing some digging. In each case it foreshadows the day when God will fulfil His part of the covenant, when the Redeemer's flesh will be cut and His blood shed.

January 26 **The Rainbow (G)**

I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you… Genesis 9:13-15.

In order for there to be a rainbow two things must be present: rain and sunshine. During the Flood the rain had fallen for almost six weeks upon the earth leaving it entirely cleansed of its corruption. Now the sun showed its cheery face to the small band of survivors, and as Noah and his family basked in its warmth, a glorious bow of colour ornamented the sky as a token of God's mercy.

From that time onward whenever a rainbow appeared, the story of God's justice and mercy would be repeated. Justice in the rain that cleansed a corrupt world, and mercy in the sunshine that promised that all life would not be destroyed again by a flood. For God, justice is never executed without mercy.

Some of you may have seen the thought-provoking painting by Harry Anderson that shows a little girl sitting on Jesus' lap. She is looking enquiringly into his face while holding one of his hands in hers, and with her other hand she is pointing to the scar. The painting is entitled, *What Happened to Your Hand?*

Like the rainbow, that scar tells of justice mingled with mercy, for justice demands the death of the sinner; mercy provides his ransom. And throughout eternity the story will be told of how God's own Son came by that scar that we might obtain mercy. As the hymn says:

And when in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song;
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.[7]

[7] *I Love to Tell the Story,* Katherine Hankey, 1866.

January 27 **A Blessing (D)**

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Genesis 12:1-3.

Three promises of blessing are given to Abraham; upon himself, upon those who come into contact with him, and upon all peoples of the earth through Him. Furthermore, the promise of blessing is given three times altogether; twice to Abraham and once to Isaac (Genesis 22:17-18; 26:4-5). The blessings were conditional upon Abraham's obedience, yet he probably didn't feel blessed when he set his eyes on drought-ridden Canaan for the first time. It seems that God's calling us to do something does not make it an easy thing to do. Abraham had much to learn about God and about waiting, and this journey became his first instructor.

We too are on a journey to a new land. For most of us it has meant leaving the security of our previous life in order to undertake a walk full of unknowns and *Why Lords?* It is also our instructor, providing the lessons God wants us to learn along the way so that when we reach that land, we shall have grown into mature people of God, blessed by Him, and a blessing to others. But like Abraham, the blessings do not always come at the first bend in the road.

God's words to Abraham also apply to the commission given the Messiah; He too was to leave His country for another land. He too was to be blessed and to be a blessing, and His name to become great. When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, did come to the new land, it was as a descendant of Abraham so that truly through him all nations have been blessed.

January 28 **The Priest King (E)**

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Genesis 14:18-20.

Melchizedek is possibly the most enigmatic character in the Scriptures. Who was he? Where did he come from? He was, according to the writer of Hebrews (7:1-10), without parents and without descent, having *'neither beginning of days, nor end of life'*. This may make him superhuman, or it may simply mean that his ancestry was unknown.

More important is Melchizedek's status as both 'king of righteousness and priest of the Most High God'. Abram's deep respect for him is evident in that he regarded him as worthy of receiving his tithes. Tithe is holy, and can be returned only to those appointed by God to receive it. Like the child Jesus, Melchizedek had evidently found special favour with both God and man (Luke 2:52).

Only One other has ever been both king and priest: Jesus the Messiah. He is King of heaven and High Priest of the sanctuary '*set up by the Lord, not by man'* (Hebrews 8:1-2). He lives and reigns forever, our loving Monarch and our merciful Intercessor.

Today's passage says that Melchizedek served bread and wine to Abram. Perhaps this hospitality prefigured the covenant that God was about to make with Abram. Nearly two thousand years later Jesus the Messiah would also serve bread and wine to His disciples in a gesture that would symbolise a new covenant between God and man, one that would be sealed by Jesus with His own blood. As Melchizedek blessed Abram, so are we greatly blessed.

January 29 **The Blood Path (E)**

So the LORD said to [Abram], "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other…When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. Genesis 15:9-17.

In early Mesopotamia a covenant between two individuals was sealed by cutting an animal in two, and both covenanters walking between the halves, their feet becoming stained in the animals blood. The contract effectively said, "If I break this covenant let me be cut open as this animal". The ceremony became a part of Israelite ritual and was still practiced in Jeremiah's time (Jeremiah 34:18-19).

In our reading for today God uses this ritual to make a covenant with Abram that He will make him the father of a great nation. Yet there is something different this time; there is no Bible record of Abram walking in the blood. God walked alone in it, for this was not a covenant that sinful man could keep (in fact Abram was to fail in the very next chapter).

When God walked alone in the blood, He became Abram's substitute Covenanter. This covenant God made with Himself as though saying to Abram, "If either you or I break this covenant, *My* blood will be shed, and *I* will be cut open as this animal."As for Abram, he was only to believe and it was counted to him as righteousness (verse 6).

Imagine that! God loves us so much that He is willing to pay the price even when *we* break the covenant. And He did too. One fateful Passover Jesus the Messiah bore His cross agonisingly up Mt. Calvary, the blood from His wounds flowing into the ground beneath His blood-stained feet. He was cut open because we have broken the covenant.

January 30 **The Angel of the Lord (A)**

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Genesis 16:7-8.

This is the first mention of an angel (Hebrew: *Malak)* in the Bible. Although we associate angels with heaven, the word *Malak* simply means 'messenger'. Therefore anyone the Lord sends with a message might technically be referred to as an angel.

There are some instances in Scripture however, when the expression 'Angel of the Lord' clearly refers to a personage of far greater magnitude than simply a messenger. This is one of those cases, for this Angel speaks to Hagar as God speaks. "*I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count"*, He says to her (verse 9). This holy being also speaks to Abraham on Moriah, Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4), and declares Zechariah the high priest righteous (Zechariah 3:1-3). In Isaiah 63:9 the Saviour is referred to as *the Angel of His presence*, and in Malachi 3:1 the Messiah is called the *Messenger of the Covenant*.

Hagar was fleeing back to Egypt and idolatry in order to escape her mistress, but that was not God's will for this child of destiny, so He intervened in person. Hagar recognised the Angel of the Lord as none other than Jehovah Himself (v.13), and said to Him, *"'you are the God who sees me...I have now seen the One who sees me*'". This was He who the Apostle Paul would later describe as being "*in the fullness of the Godhead bodily*" (Colossians 2:9). Imagine that: the first person since Adam and Eve to whom Messiah revealed Himself in His heavenly form was to an Egyptian servant girl, stranded in the desert, who was to become the mother of all the Arab peoples on the earth. What an amazing and unpredictable God is ours.

January 31 **God's Covenant (G)**

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. Genesis 17:7 KJV.

How many religions can you think of in which a god makes a perpetual covenant with His people and their descendants? A god who in effect says, "I will be your God and you shall be my people - forever." There are no conditions to be met, nothing to be done to guarantee the promise, no appeasement required. Is this too good to be true? Where is the catch? We might assume that this promise is conditional upon our obedience and that if we fail in some way, then the covenant will become null and void, and we must suffer some form of torturous punishment. Isn't that how gods work?

But this promise is not like that. It is unconditional; it stands even if we reject it. This promise was made to Abraham at the time God promised him that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants forever. Abraham's part in the covenant was that he and his offspring would be circumcised. His signature to the covenant was written in his blood.

At face value, today's reading clearly limits the covenant to one nation, the descendants of Abraham. Yet on January 27 we read that all nations would be blessed through this covenant. What is the mechanism by which the promise to Abraham would extend to all nations? The New Testament says that Jesus came to establish a world-wide kingdom in which all people may be *"…made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Hebrews 10:10). His sacrifice was sufficient for all people of all nations. "*Now"*, Paul writes, *" If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:26-29). Now we understand: when we accept Christ's sacrifice, we become, in God's sight, a descendant of Abraham.

February 1 **Abraham's Covenant (G)**

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised… and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Genesis 17:10-11.

We saw earlier that Abram did not walk the blood path because this covenant was one God made for us, not with us. Yet Abram *was* to make a blood covenant with God, his flesh was to be cut and his blood to run; he was to be circumcised.

There is meaning in the act of circumcision. Every time an infant was circumcised, his pain and blood was a reminder to the parents of the covenant that God had made with Abram. Now this little one was set apart as a child of the covenant, and throughout his life his cut flesh would remind him of the pain that the Messiah would experience, and the blood He would shed. One day his newly-wed virgin bride will also seal their union with her blood, her covenant of loyalty to her new husband (see Ephesians 5:32).

After his circumcision Abram's name was changed to Abraham, signifying his rebirth as the father of a new nation. Only now would God fulfil His promise of a child, for only in circumcision could Isaac be conceived.

You and I are invited to become citizens of this new nation, yet our circumcision is of the heart, not of blood, because Christ has trodden the blood path once and all time. Our circumcision is signified in baptism, for in so doing we are not only crucified and buried with Christ, but raised with Him so that He lives in us, and the life we live, we live by faith in His blood which was shed for us (Colossians 2:11-12; Galatians 2:20). All He asks of us is to claim His shed blood for ourselves.

February 2 **Abraham's Seed (DGH)**

Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. Genesis 18:17-18.

God intended, through Abraham, to bring redemption to every human being regardless of national boundary or language. He will repeat this promise again to Abraham (Genesis 22:18) and to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) reminding us again and again that the plan of salvation is worldwide in scope.

How would God achieve this? How would Abraham be a blessing to both China and Chile, to Arctic Inuits and to Indigenous Australians? The Apostle Paul explains in Romans 3:29-30 that Abraham was uncircumcised when he believed God's promise to make him a great nation. He was uncircumcised (if you like, a Gentile) when he was counted as righteous (Genesis 15:6). Therefore, Paul says, God is God not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles, and Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of all who believe, be they Jew or Gentile.

Therefore when Christ died on Calvary's cross, His shed blood atoned for the sins of not just Jews, but for all mankind. The Apostle Paul puts it like this: "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:26-29).

If Jesus is the Son of God by inheritance, Gentiles can become children of God by adoption, and are therefore brothers and sisters of Jesus. If He is King of kings, what status does that give you and me as brothers and sisters of the King?

February 3 Abraham's Intercession (EH)

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." Genesis 18:27-28.

Abraham's persistence in pleading on behalf of these cities reveals much about his nature. He knew exactly what went on in them, but was anxious to save their disgraceful inhabitants for the sake of his nephew Lot and his family. He even borders on the impertinent in his intercession: "After all", he argues with God, "You wouldn't kill the righteous with the wicked, would you. How could the Judge of all the earth do such a thing?"

Abraham's persistence in pleading on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah is a lesson for us. James wrote, "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16 KJV). We should always plead with God on behalf of others, but should not try to inform God of who is righteous and who is not. Lot and family were not saved because Abraham mentioned them – he didn't - they were saved because Lot welcomed the holy visitors into his home. Had he not done so they would have all perished.

Abraham's rather brazen intercession anticipates the work of the Godhead in the salvation process. He is a type of Jesus Christ our High Priest who continually intercedes with the Father on behalf of sinners who seek salvation (Hebrews 7:25). Similarly He reveals the work of the Holy Spirit who "*intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (*Romans 8:26). Just as Abraham pled the defence of foolish Lot, so we have a divine Advocate who pleads our cause before the Father, and guess what? He has never lost a case (1John 2:1).

February 4 **The Child of Promise (E)**

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age. Genesis 21:6-7.

What do a ninety-year old woman and a virgin have in common? Answer: neither can give birth to a child.

There are few Old Testament characters who are types of Christ in as many ways as Isaac. The first way is in the manner of his birth. Isaac was not just another child, he was born of a miracle, and when God allowed Sarah to wait until she was ninety before becoming a mother He was letting it be fully understood that this child was of divine purpose. Furthermore, the hundred-year old childless Abraham was first promised a son way back when he was seventy-five years of age. In this way Isaac's birth became, for 25 years, a cherished hope in Abraham's breast. Isaac was the child of promise, the one through whom a great people would come. The Bible says that Abraham believed the promise, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

Centuries earlier Adam and Eve were given the promise that one day a Redeemer would come. They believed the promise and became the spiritual forbears of all those who would long for the divine promise to be fulfilled and who would be accounted righteous for it. Countless hopeful generations passed by until it seemed impossible that the Child of promise would ever come. Then one unexpected Bethlehem night a huddle of shepherds heard the angelic announcement and joyfully rushed to be the first to worship the newborn Messiah.

Jesus Christ is the Child of promise to all who believe. Long awaited, born to a virgin, He is the hope in the breast of men and women the world over who look for a new nation whose Builder and Maker is God (Hebrews 11:10).

February 5 The Slave and the Free (GH)

The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac. Genesis 21:8-10.

Sarah took a pretty hard attitude towards Hagar, borne no doubt out of resentment toward this woman who had come to look down upon her mistress. We might have expected God to rebuke Sarah, but He didn't, in fact He took Sarah's side because only the child of promise could receive God's inheritance. Furthermore, the relationship between husband and wife is the most frequently applied metaphor used in the Bible to explain the relationship between God and the believer. Sarah was justified in her jealousy.

Jesus also alluded to this relationship: *"In my Father's house",* He reminded His disciples, *"are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you*" (John 14:2 NKJV). This was familiar territory to the disciples because a bridegroom would commonly build onto his parent's house an extra room for his bride. Nothing was spared in his loving preparation on her behalf; no joy was greater than the day it was finished so that the young man could receive his bride to her new home.

Sarah's reasoning brought out another truth: Ishmael was the son of an Egyptian slave, and although, in a literal sense, both Egyptians and slaves have a share in the kingdom of heaven, in a metaphorical sense no-one wilfully under sin or under the works-based religion of Egypt will ever be betrothed to the Prince of heaven. Paul reminds us that Hagar symbolises legalism, the attempt to obtain righteousness through works whereas Sarah, being a free woman, symbolises the promise of God's grace to all believers (Galatians 4:21-26).

February 6 **Abraham's Trial (E)**

Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Genesis 22:1-2.

The story of Abraham's willingness to give up his only begotten son to die is undoubtedly the Holy Scripture's most poignant illustration of God's plan to redeem us. It seems that every detail of the Moriah experience was to be re-enacted on that tragic Calvary day nearly two thousand years later.

The hill Moriah, the grieving father, the load of wood, the name given the place by Abraham, the substitute ram, the compliant Isaac, all tell the story of Jesus the Messiah as He was led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).

What an appalling thing for God to do, to tell Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. In fact God had no intention of seeing Isaac put to death, He wished only to teach Abraham a lesson about God's love for man, man's love for God, and His plan to save us from sin. However, He did intend Abraham to demonstrate sufficient faith so as to reveal himself willing to carry out this extraordinary act. That part was important because it was to help Abraham (and us) understand the depth of God's love in that He would one day offer His own Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Abraham passed the test; but what if he had not been able to go through with it? More to the point, what if our heavenly Father had been unable to go through with it? The consequences of that are too terrible to contemplate. Praise God we do not have to consider that frightful option. How much we owe God we will probably never fully realise because He will never ask us to pay Him back. He will ask us only to accept the gift.

February 7 **Isaac's Woodpile (EH)**

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. And the two of them went on together. Genesis 22:6.

To carry sufficient wood to consume a human body is no mean feat. The old man could not carry it, it was up to the lad to do that, and he would have needed some strength to do it. Undoubtedly young Isaac, besides being of beautiful disposition, was also a fine physical specimen, after all the offering was to be without blemish was it not?

As young Isaac, Abraham's only-begotten son, laboured slowly, yet purposefully, under his load towards his appointment with death, it occurred to him that there was an important ingredient missing in this act of worship. *"My father?"* he asked "*The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"* Even then Abraham could not bring himself to break the news to his beloved son that the lad was carrying his own funeral pyre.

One fateful day, nearly two thousand years later, God's only begotten Son was also to labour up a hill, a wooden load on His back, also the means of His death. Yet He did not need to ask His heavenly Father where the lamb was, for He knew who the Lamb was. Instead He pleaded, "*Father, Into your hands I commend my Spirit".*

In fact only a very few people present that day knew what was happening; even Jesus' closest friends failed to understand. One person who would have understood it, had he been there, was Abraham. For of all men Abraham had had the privilege of drinking the cup that the Godhead was to drink that day. Had he been there Abraham would have recalled his son's heartrending words, "My Father, where is the Lamb for the burnt offering?" Then he would have known - behold the Lamb.

February 8 **Isaac's Substitute (E)**

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Gen. 22:13.

How long had this poor creature been caught up in the thicket? From where did it come? Who owned it? Had it strayed from the flock of Melchizedek who possibly lived at an encampment known as Salem a short distance to the south? We don't know the answers to these questions, but we do know that God made sure the ram was there just when Isaac needed it. In fact, God provided it even before Isaac knew he needed it.

That it was caught by its horns is not without significance, for as the thorny briers snagged the horns of the animal, and as the creature vainly struggled to remove itself from its snare, the thorns dug into its flesh causing rivulets of blood to flow down its face. What a fitting anticipation of the day when our Saviour, His holy head pierced by thorny tiara and face streaked with blood, became our Substitute, there just when we needed Him.

The presence of the ram is a reminder that God is fully in control of every situation in our lives. Even when we see no way out, when the future looks so bleak that in our despair we know not which way to turn, God has already seen our need and provided for it. When the Passover was instituted some four hundred years later, God instructed Moses to select a lamb for the Passover sacrifice four days before it was to be offered (Exodus 12:5). In that way it was there, already provided, when the people needed to have an offering for the Lord. Similarly John 11:49-53 tells how Caiaphas the High Priest, a few days before the Antitypical Passover, unwittingly set aside the Lamb of God to be made an offering for the sins of the world. Truly God provides for us even before we are aware of our need.

February 9 **Jehovah Jireh (E)**

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Genesis 22:14.

When Abraham told Isaac that God would provide a lamb for the offering, he was saying far more than he, in his grief, could have understood. To Isaac's young ears the meaning was purely temporal, but with wisdom born of hindsight we know the actors in this drama played out another scene in which God the Father would one day offer His only begotten Son as a Lamb for the burnt offering.

Abraham named the spot where he offered Isaac *Jehovah Jireh*, meaning 'The Lord Will Provide'. We are not told exactly where on Mount Moriah this was, only that Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah on the site of Araunah's threshing floor (2Chronicles 3:1). We do not know if Isaac was offered at the place later called Calvary, or if Abraham built the altar on the threshing floor site. Maybe it is God's purpose that we do not know.

Certainly Araunah had no idea what a momentous role his little threshing floor would play in world history, for it has now become about the most significant piece of real estate in the world. Today it is the site of the *Haram ash-Sharîf,* the traditional site of Mohammed's ascension to heaven, and includes the world renowned Dome of the Rock.

In Abraham's day however, it was a bare hill far from any city. There Abraham built an altar upon which to offer his only-begotten son Isaac, not because God wanted Isaac dead, but because God wanted Abraham to understand that one day He would offer *His* Only-begotten Son as a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. It was here that centuries later our Lord was rejected by the sons of Isaac, condemned to death and led out to Calvary to be crucified.

February 10 As The Stars Of Heaven (CD)

…because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven… And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed….Genesis 22:16-18 KJV.

Satan must have shuddered when he overheard this promise. He had not been able to destroy the Seed while it passed along a single family strand. Now he had lost his chance to kill Isaac, and who knows how long before the single strand would become many. When Jacob produced twelve sons, life became much more complicated for Satan in his fixation to destroy the Seed of the woman. After all, as the Apostle Paul would one day write, "*The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ"* (Galatians 3:16). One person in millions for Lucifer to identify, with no knowledge, until the time of Daniel the prophet, of how many generations would pass before the Seed would come (Daniel 9:25). With each fleeting generation doubling the number of strands, and with no certainty through which strand the inheritance was passing, the serpent was no match for the wisdom of an omniscient Deity. "Which son of Jacob shall I destroy? Reuben is firstborn; let's destroy him. Okay, he's been disinherited – not him now. What about Simeon? No, he's cruel (good work Me). But look at this snivelling little goody-two-shoes Joseph, let's get the brothers to kill him. Masterstroke – with Joseph dead and the others murderers, that will only leave Benjamin to worry about. Rage! Rage! Rage! It was Judah all along – and him the one whose son is also his son-in law. Foul! Not fair, God. If you want to play dirty, I can too. Wait till you see the Pharaoh I've got lined up. And in case he lets me down, I'm going to have ready a phony prophet and call him Balaam (Devourer). Kill them all, I say – and if there are any left over I will corrupt the little wretches. There will be no Seed!"[8]

[8] With apologies to CS Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

February 11 **Rebekah's Blessing (G)**

And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies". Gen. 24:60.

An Irish blessing goes like this: "May the road rise up to meet you, may the wind be ever at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face and the rain fall softly on your fields. And until we meet again, may God hold you in the hollow of his hand."

Language has no better purpose than when used to bestow a blessing. It ever remains with the receiver as a promise of the giver's goodwill. In ancient Israel, God instructed the High Priest how to bless the people; he was to say, "*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace"* (Numbers 6:22-27). In these words God explained that He was putting His own Name upon the people. In Bible culture a name signifies the character of the bearer. So by putting His Name upon the people, God was placing His own goodness upon them, for these people were to represent God to the world so that all who met them would see God in them.

Rebekah's mother and brother little knew the fulfilment of their blessing. Little did Laban, Rebekah's brother, know the way he would deal with her son, Jacob, a few decades later. Yet, no human blessing was ever more perfectly fulfilled than this one, not only did a great nation come from the union between Isaac and Rebekah, but through them has come Christ's spiritual nation that will forever possess the gates of its enemies. John was privileged to see in vision Rebekah's spiritual offspring possessing those gates: "*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb"* (Revelation 7:9).

February 12 **Isaac's Marriage (GH)**

...Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Gen. 24:64-67.

Not only is this a touching love story, but it beautifully illustrates God's tenderness toward His people. Especially does it foreshadow the joyful day when Christ shall come to collect his bride, the faithful church, and take her to be with Him in heaven. The story tells of a loving father who seeks the very best for his only begotten son. He sends his devoted servant (who had been heir to his estate until the son came along) on a mission to find Isaac a wife and bring her to him.

Throughout Scripture God's faithful are illustrated as a virtuous and beautiful woman, and Jesus often used this metaphor to describe the relationship between Himself and His followers. In Bible times it was the custom for a bridegroom to build an extra room onto his parents' home for his new bride to live in. In keen anticipation of that exciting day the eager young man would have to be held in check by his wiser father who would not allow the wedding to take place until the home was perfect. Thus Jesus was to say in John 14:1-3, "*In my Father's house are many rooms…I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am".*

We can picture the sensitive Isaac lovingly preparing the tent that had been his mother's for this beautiful young woman who was to share the rest of her life with him. When he sees the camel train in the distance, he eagerly runs to meet it so that he can accompany her to her new world. So *"the Lord himself will come down from heaven… and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words"* (1Thessalonians 4:16-18).

February 13 **Abraham's Obedience (E)**

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws. Genesis 26:4-5.

When we looked at Genesis 18:17-18 we saw Abraham promised that all nations, Gentile nations, would be blessed through him. The reason God chose Abraham, we were told, is because He knew he would raise his children in the way of the Lord. Now the same promise is made to Isaac because Abraham had *obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.*

We might ask what commands, decrees and laws did Abraham obey since none were given until the time of Moses. In fact, with a little digging, each of the Ten Commandment concepts can be found in the Book of Genesis. Abraham was well aware of the culture of holiness and obedience that constituted the life of service to the Creator God.

For modern-day grace-filled Christianity, the emphasis on obedience can be disturbing, suggesting a legalistic religion. However, Abraham's faithful obedience, even at the cost of his son's life, prefigured the obedience of Jesus Christ who "*humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:8-11). Every moment of Christ's earthly life was one of submissive compliance to the will of God, a life that climaxed in that most plaintive expression of obedience ever recorded, "*My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done"* (Matthew 26:42). Has Christ's obedience relieved us of the duty to be obedient ourselves? God forbid! For we are told, "*just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do"* (1Peter 1:15). Obedience may not be the means to our salvation, but it is surely the fruit of it.

February 14 **Isaac's Patience (E)**

Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!"…Then they dug another well, but they quarrelled over that one also…He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land." Genesis 26:19-22.

This incident gives us an interesting insight into the character of Isaac. This man, who once had been willing to be put to death because God commanded it, shows himself later in life to be a model of humility. These miserable herdsmen showed no interest in the wells while they were useless, but as soon as Isaac and his men went to the effort of clearing them, these wretches claimed them as their own. Yet Isaac chose not to be embittered by these selfish men; he could have claimed the wells as his own because his father had first dug them. He knew, however, that that was not God's way, and humbly chose the path of peace and diplomacy. In doing so, Isaac avoided what would have surely ended up as a bitter feud between neighbours. "*Blessed are the peacemakers"*, said Jesus, "*for they will be called sons of God"* (Matthew 5:9).

Similarly, we followers of Christ should not become distracted by what we see as our rights (of others' maybe, but not our own), or to display self-serving 'righteous indignation' when personally mistreated. Isaac's meekness prefigured the nature of Jesus who "*was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth…"*(Isaiah 53:7); who said, *"...I am gentle and humble in heart"* (Matthew 11:29).

Isaac's example teaches us a powerful lesson. Instead of displaying indignation, he saw the situation as a sign from God as to where he should go. "*Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land,"* he said.

February 15 **Isaac's Fidelity (EH)**

Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"…Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Genesis 26:26-31.

This is a story of forgiveness that teaches a lesson about God's willingness to pardon us even after we have completely rejected Him. Isaac had moved his household to the land of the Philistines due to a famine in Canaan. While there God had blessed him so greatly that he had become wealthy beyond measure. Consequently, Abimelech, the Philistine king, began to fear and envy him, and asked him to leave the land.

Later Abimelech travelled to Isaac's new location at Beersheba and requested that they make a covenant together, possibly a blood path covenant like the one God made to Abraham.

Isaac could have been offended with Abimelech for making him leave the place where he had so prospered, but that was not Isaac's way. Not only did he make the covenant with Abimelech, but, the record says, he made him a banquet, and they ate and drank together. Abimelech was indeed blessed to have a neighbour like Isaac.

In this Isaac prefigured Jesus. Even when we reject Him he readily forgives us when we come back to Him, and, as Isaac did for Abimelech, prepares a great banquet for us so that we may eat and drink with Him. No recrimination, no lecture, no castigation, just joy that we are reunited. "*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb"* (Revelation 19:9).

February 16 **Isaac's Integrity (E)**

Isaac answered Esau, "I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?" Genesis 27:37.

Isaac's life has been one of humble submission to the will of God. But now something else is revealed, a firmness of principle that love for his carefree son cannot compromise. His disappointment in Jacob's deceit might have tempted him to 'unbless' the devious young man, but he would not do it because the birthright is sacred; through this line the Messiah would come. We can hear the sorrow in his voice when he says to Esau, "*what can I possibly do for you, my son"?*

When we look at the life of Christ, which Isaac has so well prefigured, we see His great love for us also clothed in firmness of principle. For example, when a rich young ruler came to Jesus to ask what he must do to inherit eternal life, Mark records that Jesus *looked at him and loved him* (Mark 10:17-22). Imagine the sorrow the Son of God must have felt when this young man turned away because temporal things were worth more to him than the Kingdom. This talented and influential young man would have had much to offer the fledgling Church, yet he, like Esau, sold his inheritance for 'a plate of lentil stew'.

There is a lesson for us here; it concerns our power of choice and our priorities. Esau wanted the temporal benefits of the birthright, but not the spiritual responsibility that went with it. Each of us must choose during this life what it is that is important to us. If the good things of this world are more important to us than our spiritual inheritance we are free to choose them, but like Esau, there will come a day when, with breaking heart, Jesus will say to us, "*what can I possibly do for you, my son?"* With Jesus the kingdom of heaven cannot be compromised.

February 17 **Jacob's Ladder (BE)**

Jacob…had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Genesis 28:10-13.

Imagine Jacob's misery the day he left the comfort and security of his lifelong home; his grieving mother, his disappointed father, and his furious brother who has vowed to kill him. Jacob wanted more than anything else at that time to know that he was not forever cut off from God and family. He needed to know that the relationships he had so badly damaged would be restored. In response to this heartfelt desire, God gave Jacob a dream in which he saw a ladder set up between heaven and earth, the top rung being in heaven, and the bottom rung on the earth. On the ladder he saw angels moving between heaven and earth continually, and he knew that God had provided a way for him to be saved.

Centuries later, Jesus was to refer to Jacob's dream when he said to Nathaniel*, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man"* (John 1:51). By these words Jesus was letting Nathaniel know that *He* was the ladder which Jacob saw. Christ is the only means by which we can attain heaven because *He* alone has authority to offer heaven and yet is fully man. Were He less than fully God, the ladder could not reach heaven. Were He less than fully man, it could not reach the earth. If He fell short in any way there would be no bridging the gulf between heaven and earth.

Jacob needed a Saviour that lonely night, and God showed him that he had one. As for us, we must keep our sights on the glory at the top of the ladder.

…Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said [to Laban]*, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel"…So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.* Genesis 29:17-20.

There is a difference between Rachel and Jacob's other three wives. She was the only bride who was chosen by him, and the only one he was in love with. Jacob was not rebuked by God in his partiality toward Rachel. As the bride of his love she symbolised the church of God of which there can be only one. Leah was party to Laban's deception, and made no effort to reveal herself to Jacob even though she knew it would break his heart. By pretending to be Rachel, Leah left her sister out in the cold, miserable in the knowledge that the man who loved her was now united with someone else. Leah presumed to be Jacob's bride, but knowingly acted in opposition to his heart's greatest desire.

In this act Leah represented a class of Christians who claim to be followers of Christ, but who are not. Jesus refers to them in Matthew 7:21-23: *"Many",* He said*, "will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord…Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you..'"* These, like Leah, presume to be the bride, but they do not live according to the Groom's will.

Jacob did finally marry his beloved Rachel, but from that time on there was a rivalry between the sisters that brought great sorrow and perplexity to him. It was a fateful irony that this man who had pretended to be his brother should have the same deception practiced on him. Laban's act was only the first of many sorrows that would befall Jacob, but through them all he became the man God wanted him to be. Many years later God changed his name to 'Israel', the prince of God, and Rachel's firstborn became the prime minister of Egypt and one of the great Christ-types of all Scripture.

…Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. Genesis 31:38-40.

Jacob exercised the utmost care over unappreciative Laban's flocks. He kept watch over them by day and night to ensure their protection, he attended the birth of their young, he treated their parasites and blights, he led them to green pastures, his rod and staff were always there to comfort them. More than that, Jacob made himself personally responsible for all sheep lost to thieves or predators. When Laban demanded compensation for lost sheep, Jacob paid the full price from his own pocket even though these may have been under the care of hired hands at the time of their loss.

Jacob's costly devotion to Laban's flocks prefigured the character and work of One who would leave the glory of heaven to "*search for the lost and bring back the strays,* [to] *bind up the injured and strengthen the weak…I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down",* He says (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*,[9] Philip Keller explains that for a sheep to lie down, four requirements must be met: it must be free from fear, free from friction with other sheep, free from the irritation of insects, and free from hunger. Only in the presence of a good shepherd will the timid sheep experience such contentment. Similarly the presence of Jesus in our lives calms our fears, gives us grace and patience in human relationships, soothes our nerves frayed by the daily irritations that pester us, and provides for all our material needs; He is the Good Shepherd.

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[9]Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1970, p35.

February 20 **Jacob's Trouble1 (A)**

...When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me". Genesis 32:24-26.

Twenty years after his shameful flight Jacob was now going home. He clearly understood the nature of his sin against his father and against Esau, and knew that by now Esau would have assumed himself heir of their father's estate. Now Esau had double reason to kill Jacob: for revenge, and to protect his presumed inheritance. As Jacob saw the familiar hills of home taking shape before him, word came to him that Esau was approaching with four hundred men, and he knew that because of his sin he and his family were in the greatest peril. In despair Jacob fell before his God, and pled for deliverance, "*and a man wrestled with him till daybreak"* (v. 24).

Who was the Man with whom Jacob wrestled? It was the same Man to whom centuries later a wealthy nobleman would cry out in anguish, *"Sir, come down before my child dies"* (John 4:46-53). This nobleman too had to wrestle with the Man. He had been prepared to believe in Jesus only if his son was healed, but Jesus' challenge*, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe"* forced the proud man to see his true state before God. Like Jacob, the nobleman clung to the Man who could save his son, and his faith was rewarded.

There are times in our lives when all we can do in our despair is to throw ourselves at the mercy of the God we have so often offended. At those times we too must wrestle with the Man in agony of soul until we understand that before a holy God all our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isaiah 46:6), and cry out, "*I will not let you go unless you bless me".* When that happens a great victory has been won; we have overcome.

February 21 **Jacob's Trouble 2 (AE)**

*So Jacob was left alone, When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*Genesis 32:24-26.

God had told Jacob, "*Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you".* Now Jacob had obeyed that instruction only to find a vindictive Esau waiting for him with 400 men. Jacob knew that the next day he would be placed into the hands of his enemies and would be put to death. His only recourse was to go to a place aside in order to spend the night before the God who had said, "*Return to your country...and I will deal well with you*".

In facing Esau, Jacob became a type of Christ who was also to be put to death by His vindictive siblings. *"Sorrowful unto death"*, Jesus sought the solace of a place apart where He could pour out His agony to the One who had sent him to the land of His brothers. We know nothing of the struggle that took place that night in Gethsemane, but we do know that, as with Jacob, peace came with the dawn.

Those who walk with God instinctively know when He is calling them. They hear the call and they obey. Yet, like Jacob, the call leads them into times of trouble from which there seems no escape. It is then that they must go to Gethsemane and wrestle with God. The night may be long, the conflict severe. They will be confused as to why God says, *"I will deal well with you"*, yet *this* happens. What they must learn is that the growth process is a testing process. Can gold be purified without fire? Can a gem be cut without a blow? Jacob became Israel that night, and he was reconciled to his brother the next day. We can choose to drift through our Christian life, or we can allow God to lead us to Gethsemane. Which path we take is up to us.

February 22 **Joseph's Coat (EG)**

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. Genesis 37:3.

In the Bible there is no woman more deeply loved by a man than Rachel by Jacob, now named Israel, and no child more treasured than Joseph the son she bore him in his old age. A portrait of God's love for us is painted in Israel's devotion to Rachel, and God's love for His only begotten Son is portrayed in Israel's affection for Joseph.

Israel's love for young Joseph prompted him to make for him a special coat. The Hebrew word used here for 'coat' suggests a sleeved garment of great beauty and expense, one that would be worn only by someone of importance, and never a labourer. The message to all was that Joseph was the favoured one, perhaps the one to inherit the birthright.

No wonder Joseph's brothers so hated the youth. Yet when they sold him as a slave, dipped the coat in sheep's blood, and took it home to their grief-stricken father, they were not rid of him as they thought, but were unwittingly opening the way for Joseph to one day become their saviour and provider.

Israel weaved Joseph's coat with his own hands; so it was God who provided the garment that covered Adam's nakedness (Genesis 3:21). So it was the king who provided the wedding garment (Matthew 22:12), and so it is Christ alone who can provide the robe that the redeemed will wear. For Jesus says, "*I counsel you to buy from me…white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness"* (Revelation 3:18). Joseph's coat reminds us that Jesus provides for us a heavenly garment that not only covers our sinfulness, but signifies our special relationship with our heavenly Father.

…and it came to pass, when [Onan] *went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord; therefore He killed him also*. Genesis 38:9-10.

We need to understand this strange passage because it has much to do with the promise of Genesis 3:15 concerning the Seed of the woman. The theme of the Seed runs throughout Genesis, and indeed the entire Bible. When mankind sinned, a Redeemer was promised who was to be a direct descendant of Adam and Eve. Thus Eve's Seed (capital S) was the Messiah, the Redeemer. It was Abraham's line that God chose as a conduit for the Seed for, as He said to Abraham, *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice"* (Genesis 22:18).

When Satan heard the words of Genesis 3:15 which, in fact, were spoken to him, not to Eve, he determined that he would destroy the Seed. Undoubtedly he saw as a masterstroke his scheme to have Cain kill Abel, because whichever of the two sons was to carry the Seed, neither of them would carry it. But, as we heard Eve say in Genesis 4:25, God "*appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed."*

Onan's refusal to provide an heir for Judah's firstborn son, Er, was a further attempt by Satan to interfere with the line of the Seed. By refusing to impregnate Tamar, Onan was frustrating God's plan to provide a Redeemer for the world. The seed that carried the Messiah's DNA was now on the ground. And for that God killed him.

Such is God's love for the world that in spite of every effort to frustrate His plan, He still finds a way around the barriers set up by Satan and by those who fall under his influence. In this case God chose a most unusual and provocative way around the problem which will be the subject of tomorrow's reading.

February 24 The Knight and the Queen (G)

About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!" As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognise whose seal and cord and staff these are." Genesis 38:24-25.

Boy, when God sets out to do something, He surely does it. No one will ever be able to say God does not take whatever steps are necessary to fulfil His promise to save us. Now that's Love! When Onan refused to give Tamar a child, Satan said to God, "Check". But God had a move up His sleeve that the Accuser had not foreseen: He moved one of His knights – an unworthy knight at that. But God uses unworthy knights – and pawns - if he didn't, I would not be writing this. The unworthy knight was Onan's father, Judah, who had greatly sinned in refusing to allow Tamar, who had waited for years, to marry his youngest son. Tamar was the pawn in this duel, but she too sinned when she knowingly committed incest with her father-in-law. It seems God allows sinners to do their thing, and then uses it for good. The good is that Tamar became pregnant to her father-in-law, and even at the risk of His integrity God saved the Seed and preserved the Messianic line through Judah's new son Perez.

So Matthew records that Judah was *"the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar"* (Matthew 1:3), and when we count a further ten generations we find that Perez was a direct ancestor of King David, the man after God's own heart. From David another twenty-eight generations would pass, and then one silent night in a Bethlehem stable the Christ was born and God said to Satan, "Check mate". With an unworthy knight and a pawn, God saved the world. But of course the pawn was not a pawn at all; she was a queen.

February 25 Joseph's Temptation (EH)

No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? Genesis 39:9.

As all men well know, this temptation would have been almost too much for any hormonal young male to overcome. Yet Joseph would not even countenance the advances of this alluring *femme fatale*. "How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" is his defence against this overpowering temptation. The ingrained sense of God's presence in his heart acts as a protective wall around his soul making sin something hateful to him.

Joseph's integrity under extreme temptation foreshadows Jesus who has been tempted *"in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus taught us to say, "*Lead us not into temptation"* (Luke 11:4). He was not suggesting that God might otherwise deliberately place us in Satan's way, but was telling us to follow Joseph's example, who refused even to be in the presence of Potiphar's wife. When we know that a situation could compromise us, the best thing we can do is avoid the situation.

Like Joseph's, Christ's struggle with Satan in the wilderness was a very real conflict. The story in the Gospel is brief, but this was a 40-day battle against Satan's plan to get Him to give up on humanity and let us pay for our own sin. Our lives hung in the balance during that decisive clash between good and evil.

Joseph paid a high price for his integrity to God. Yet, there came a day when his faithfulness was rewarded. He had learned adversity through suffering (Hebrews 5:8), and now he was qualified to be elevated to a position at the right hand of Pharaoh himself.

February 26 **Joseph's Suffering (E)**

But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon. Genesis 40:14-15.

When Joseph's brothers sold him to the traders for twenty pieces of silver they unwittingly anticipated the day when one of Christ's disciples would betray Him for thirty pieces of silver (the traders would have received thirty pieces for Joseph at the slave market).

The injustice meted out toward Joseph, and his patient spirit during these trials, foreshadows that heaped upon the Messiah who "*was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7). Rather than take revenge upon his brothers when he later had the opportunity, he forgave them saying it was "*to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."*

Joseph is a supreme role-model for the Christian: he is kidnapped, sold as a slave, falsely accused, imprisoned without trial, and he says, *"God did it to save lives"*. There are two important lessons here: the first is that when something bad happens to us, rather than feeling ourselves a victim, we must learn to view it as permitted by God for a good purpose, even when we can't see what the good might be.

Secondly, we need to learn that God is God, and can use us in His service in any way He wishes. Be it palace or prison; be it as celebrity or slave. We are His servants; we do what He commands and go where he bids. All we have to do is rejoice to be in His service. Then one day when our work is all done, He will say "*Well done, good and faithful servant…Come and share your master's happiness"* (Matthew 25:21).

February 27 **The Provider (EH)**

When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you."… Joseph opened the storehouses…and all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world. Genesis 41:55-57.

We have seen Joseph as the beloved son of his father, despised and rejected by his brothers, sold as a slave, tempted yet innocent, judged and imprisoned, and finally exalted to the right hand of the mighty Pharaoh so that people from all nations came to bow down before him.

Yet Joseph anticipates the Messiah in one more important way: the text says, "*Joseph opened the storehouses".* It was to Joseph the people must come in order to be fed. In John 6:35 Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life: he that comes to me will never go hungry"*. Now Jesus never made claims about Himself without backing them up with demonstrations of their truth. Was He really the bread of life? In John's account Jesus had just fed more than five thousand people when He made that claim. Yet when the meal was over, and they could eat no more, they gathered up 12 baskets of leftovers.

This is consistent with the way God works. Undoubtedly when Noah left the ark there was still enough food in it for man and beast until new crops grew. Surely, when Joseph finally closed up the storehouses of Egypt for the last time, there was still ample corn to spare. There was only one source of grain during that great famine: Joseph. He was the great provider without whom there was nothing to eat, yet there was sufficient for all who came to buy. Nobody went hungry.

Today Jesus provides for our every need and there is sufficient for all. All we need to do is come to Him and say, "*Give us this day our daily bread"* (Matthew 6:11).

February 28 **Israel's Flight (EFH)**

And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied. "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." Genesis 46:2-4.

Jacob's migration to Egypt introduces a new line of prophetic understanding in the Scriptures. Jacob is now called Israel, and "*Israel is My firstborn son"* (Exodus 4:22). When Jesus arose from the waters of baptism God said, "*This is my beloved Son"* (Matthew 3:17). Thus both the nation of Israel and Jesus are described by God as His Son. So, as we follow the course of God's people through the centuries we will find that their history also prefigures the events in the life of Christ. It will become a fascinating study to follow the parallels between the history of Israel and the life of the Messiah.

Just as Israel fled to Egypt for protection during the great famine, so God said to Jesus' stepfather, "*take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him"* (Matthew 2:13).

While it was a famine that led Israel into Egypt, so there was a spiritual famine in the land at the time of Christ's birth. What an amazing thing: for centuries the prophets have told of the Redeemer to come, giving even the time and place of his arrival (Daniel 9 and Micah 5), but when He did come even the religious leaders were unaware of it. So God chose some humble shepherds, some foreign astronomers and some livestock to witness the event.

The Scriptures say that Christ will come again the second time as King of kings and Lord of lords. Could it be that on that day the world will also be asleep?

February 29 **Israel's Blessing (A)**

God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads. Genesis 48:15-16 (KJV).

Why did Jacob put this blessing upon these two sons of Joseph? In doing so Joseph received a double blessing in that he became the progenitor of two tribes.

Let's understand the unique dynamic going on here: These two boys were also the grandsons of the high priest of Egypt's highest priestly order. Surely he too would have had great designs for his two prominent grandsons. What influences would come to bear on these two boys as they grew up in the luxury of Egyptian high society?

Yet it was Jacob's, and Joseph's, wish that these lads grow up to regard themselves as Hebrew, not Egyptian. They wanted them to choose to identify with a despised shepherd people (who would soon become slaves) when they could be among the elite of Egyptian society. The fact that Ephraim and Manasseh are listed among the tribes of Israel tells us the choice they made.

Jacob asks '*the Angel who redeemed me from all evil'* to bless the lads. He surely alludes to the One he wrestled with that lonely night, and refers to him as his Redeemer, the evil being Esau's intended destruction of him and all his family. He had not been willing to let his Redeemer go unless He blessed him. Now he asks the same Angel to bless his grandsons for they are in great peril from Egypt's influence.

The Angel who redeemed Jacob is also our Redeemer. Whatever is our greatest peril He will deliver us from it. Even though we will need to struggle with Him, we can always say with Job, "*I know that my Redeemer lives"* (Job 19:25).

March 1 **Jacob's Great Prophecy (D)**

The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. Genesis 49:10.

This passage tells us far more than simply that the Messiah will be of the tribe of Judah. It also tells us that the governorship of Israel will remain with Judah until the Messiah comes to inherit the throne as its rightful King.

What an audacious prophecy to make; that throughout sixteen centuries until the Messiah, only Judah would provide the rulership. But that is exactly what happened; after the dispersal of the ten tribes the entire nation was assimilated into Judah. Even during the Babylonian captivity and the dark days of Antiochus IV there was still limited self-government. Not until the Christ child was about ten years of age did the Roman Emperor appoint a non-Jew, Coponius, to govern the land (The Edomite Herods were also Jews - see Deut. 23:7-8). Even then the Sanhedrin still exercised limited control until AD70 when Jerusalem was finally destroyed.

Now this is interesting; it means that when David was crowned king of Israel around 1000BC, his reign began an everlasting dynasty, the first thousand years being temporal, and thereafter a spiritual kingdom under his blood descendant, Jesus Christ. When Jesus is crowned King of kings and Lord of lords, the words of Revelation 11:15 will be fulfilled, "*The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever*."

Today Christ has "*established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all"* (Psalm 103:19). The good news is that by acknowledging Him as our King, we become citizens of His kingdom; no passport required, just confidence in the promise that, *"whoever comes to me I will never drive away"* (John 6:37).

March 2 **The Great Provider (EH)**

Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers. Genesis 49:26.

Joseph stands alongside Noah, Isaac, Moses and David as one of the great Christ-types of the Old Testament. We have already seen several ways in which his life reveals Jesus. Here is a summary of those Christ-like qualities of Joseph:

- His father made him a special coat with his own hands (Matthew 22:12).
- He was given a dream of the heavenly bodies bowing down to him (Philippians 2:9).
- He was despised by his brothers because of his goodness (John 7:1-7).
- He was sold for the price of a slave (Matthew 26:14).
- He went to prepare a place for his people (John 14:1-3).
- Although of noble birth he became a servant (Philippians 2:5-8).
- He was victorious over temptation (Hebrews 4:15).
- He suffered being innocent (Matt. 27:24; Luke 23:40-41).
- He was a blessing to all who came in contact with him (Luke 7:22).
- He fed all who came for food turning nobody away hungry (Matthew 14:16-21).

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers sought reassurance that he would not now take vengeance upon them. But that was not Joseph's way, "…*you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20). By his faithfulness, Joseph became the saviour of the nations and the preserver of the Seed of Israel.

March 3 **Moses' Deliverance (EFH)**

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." Exodus 1:22.

We have seen how Israel's removal to Egypt foreshadows the earthly experience of the Messiah who also was taken to Egypt in order to preserve His young life. Pharaoh's intent was to rid Egypt of all Hebrews by destroying every male child, and by condemning every female child to either childlessness, or to produce Egyptian children.

Similarly, some fifteen hundred years later, Herod sought, by putting to death all boys two years of age or under, to destroy the young Messiah, and hence the spiritual nation that He would engender (Matthew 2:13-18).

Yet these paranoid atrocities were a part of a much larger conflict. Satan ever seeks to destroy what is God's; it is his avowed intent to bring to nothing God's grand plan to restore mankind to His image.

In these last days before Christ's return we will see more and more such outrages, and many of us will blame God demanding to know why he allows them. Many will reject the Gospel because they see God as the cause of suffering, when all along it is the enemy of man who is to blame.

When bad things happen to us we need to resist the temptation to blame God, and understand that, as with Job of ages past, we are involved in a far wider conflict (see Job 1, 2). God does not shield us from bad things, but allows us to experience them that we may become wiser and better people. The prized diamond is not that way by default, but only at the hands of the master craftsman. So then, just as Satan failed to destroy the infants Moses and Jesus, so by God's grace he will fail to destroy us.

March 4 **Of Wells and Weddings (BG)**

…Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. Exodus 2:15-17.

It seems that in Bible times the well was the local hangout for a young man to find a bride, for it was at a well that Eliezer found Rebekah for Isaac and it was at a well that Jacob met and fell in love with Rachel. Now it is at a well that Moses first meets his future wife, Zipporah, a descendant of Abraham. Maybe this is natural, for without water there is no society.

With the arrival of Moses in Midian, the sisters no longer had to contend with the uncouth shepherds, whose treatment of the girls exhibited the same tyranny that had led Moses to kill the Egyptian. It seems that Moses was governed by a hatred of injustice. The incident resulted in his remaining in the household as their protector for the next forty years. Wells, it appears, are fateful places.

A well also became a fateful spot for Jesus. It occurred one hot dusty day as He and his disciples were travelling through Samaria. As He rested by a well the disciples went off to look for food. While they were away a woman came to the well to draw water and was taken by surprise when He broke protocol by asking her for a drink. The conversation that followed is highly provocative: *""Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,"* Jesus told her, "*but…the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:13). The woman believed what Jesus said to her and through her testimony many came to hear the word of God from Christ's own mouth. That day Samaria accepted the invitation to become a part of Christ's world-wide church because God had directed His Servant to a well.

March 5 **The Great I AM (ABH)**

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:13-14.

This passage is not really Messianic, but it is difficult to pass it by without a mention because Jesus alluded to it so strongly in His claims about Himself. For there would be no purpose in showing Jesus as the Messiah if He did not claim to be so.

How did Jesus demonstrate this claim? According to C.S Lewis, He based it on three things: 1, His authority to forgive sins 2, to have always existed and 3, His intent to come back to judge the world at the end of time.[10]

The second claim, to have always existed, comes out of our reading for today, for Jesus frequently used the expression *I AM* to describe Himself; *I AM* the Good Shepherd, *I AM* the living Bread, *I AM* the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and more.

Three times in John 8 Jesus refers to himself as *I AM*. In verses 24 and 28, the expression is obscured by the addition of supplied words that are not in the original. For example the original Greek of verse 28 says, "*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am".* However, verse 58 translates Jesus' words exactly as the Greek, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am"* (KJV).

What was Jesus claiming by these words? Who is the Messiah? We need to answer this question by examining the evidence and deciding for ourselves. We owe Jesus that much, for He asks His disciples, *"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*(Matthew 16:13). In tomorrow's reading we shall examine this subject again, and look at the implications of Jesus' claim to be the great *I AM*.

[10] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Harper Collins e-books, Location 809

March 6 **Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (ABH)**

God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. Exodus 3:15.

I AM WHO I AM is the English translation of the Hebrew *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. The word *Ehyeh* – I am – is believed by many scholars to be the root word YHWH, from which we get the name Yahweh, or Jehovah. In many English versions of the Bible, the letters YHWH are translated *LORD* in capitals, and refer to Jehovah. Therefore Jesus' claim in John 8:58 to be *Ehyeh* - I AM - is deeply meaningful, for He is stating that He is Jehovah, the very One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Fully divine yes, but Jehovah Himself? We need to get our head around that. Isn't Jehovah God the Father? Yet, as we progress through the Scriptures, especially the Book of Isaiah, we shall find that indeed, "*...The Word was God... and the Word became flesh"* (John 1:1, 14).

So we ask ourselves the question, Was Jesus a blasphemer as believed by the Pharisees who took up stones to throw at Him? Or was He, as Simon Peter asserted, *"...the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16)? As John Duncan put it, "Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable." [11]

What then shall we do with this Jesus? Shall we crucify Him? Shall we lock Him away? Shall we follow Him? The choice is entirely ours; there is no coercion. You cannot force someone to follow you. You can drive them in front of you, but good shepherds never to that. The truth is that no man who ever lived has had a greater influence upon the world than this peaceful Galilean who bid humble folk, "*Follow Me"*.

[11] See, for example: https://conversantfaith.com/2012/05/04/the-history-of-liar-lunatic-lord-trilemma.

March 7 **The Younger Brother (FH)**

Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son...". Exodus 4:22.

One of the great arguments for the authenticity of the Bible is its departure from the norms that one would expect in any orthodox narrative. For example, who would have thought of inventing a story in which in nearly every generation it is the firstborn who fails and his younger brother who receives the firstborn status? Firstly, we see it in Adam who rebelled and lost his exalted position on earth and needed to be redeemed by Christ, the second Adam, who restored all that the first had lost. Then Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau and Reuben all lost their firstborn status or their birthright to their younger brothers. Moses outshone Aaron, his older brother, and the trend continued even in God's rejection of Israel's first king, Saul, in favour of its second, David.

In view of this, what do we think when we read in today's passage that the Israelites are God's firstborn son? Is this blessed son of God also doomed to fail? Well, history speaks for itself, and we do not know what graceful nobility might have been the hallmark of this great nation. Now another Son has come of whom God said *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased*" (Matthew 3:17). This Son fulfilled the divinely ordained work that God gave Him to do, and as a result a new nation was born, a spiritual nation, under a new covenant, whose citizens will have God's Law written upon their hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:33), and will not fail.

We should not think that citizenship of this new nation is closed to the elder brothers, for they, including Cain, could choose to repent even though they would have to live with the consequences of their actions. None of us is beyond redemption, and the quality of our life here below is not a question on the application form for citizenship of this new nation. The only question on the form is, "Do you believe?"

March 8 **God's Firstborn Son (EF)**

Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'" Exodus 4:22-23.

It was God's instruction to the nation that every firstborn son be dedicated to the Lord as holy. "*Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me…"* (Exodus 13:2). Now Moses was to take this firstborn son of God, the nation of Israel, and dedicate it to God. For God was redeeming His people from bondage and bringing them into the land of promise.

The dedication of the firstborn son not only celebrated the people's release from Egypt, but it foreshadowed a greater deliverance when God's own Son would set free a people from the bondage of sin, and lead them home.

Thus, centuries later when Joseph and Mary presented the holy infant at the temple in Jerusalem they were not only doing so in accordance with God's law, but were performing an act of extreme significance before heaven. Jesus' name was being placed on the roll of the firstborn as the promised Redeemer of the world.

The bored temple priest had no idea that the 40-day old babe in his arms, so poor His parents could afford only the cheapest offering, was the One to whom all such presentations had pointed. Yet God did not let this moment pass by unnoticed, for faithful Simeon was there, and by divine inspiration, thrilled to his very soul, he took the child in his arms and cried out, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel* " (Luke 2:29-32 KJV).

March 9 **The Doer of Miracles (E)**

…Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Exodus 7:10-12.

There was something very special about Aaron's rod. Not only did God turn it into a snake, but later it was to bud almond blossoms. In Aaron's rod was life, and as such it was placed into the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder that God had chosen him as the head of a priestly order. We shall look more closely at Aaron's rod another day.

Miracles have the power to turn the heart toward God. Yet not all miracles are from God. The enemy of man is well aware that he can use miracles to keep people in darkness and enslaved to sin. We must learn to discern the true from the false when it comes to miracles.

When Aaron's rod became a snake, the magicians sought to imitate the 'trick'. Yet Satan has no power to create life, he is the source of all trickery, but is still only an illusionist; his imitation snakes were quickly devoured by the living snake.

Moses, in performing these miracles, prefigured Jesus who, during His ministry on earth, also performed many miracles. Jesus' miracles were not simply tricks designed to get Him followers, He came to relieve suffering, and to make the world a better place. He fed, healed, and restored to life because in His kingdom there will be no hunger, sickness or death. As with Jesus, Moses' miracles became a foundation stone in the establishment of a holy nation. Satan's tricks, on the other hand, fail to uphold the Word of God. "*To the law and to the testimony",* says Isaiah, *"If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn"* (Isaiah 8:20).

March 10 **The Passover Lamb (EH)**

…on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family…The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Exodus 12:3-6.

The Passover was to become the first in a series of annual feasts celebrated by the nation of Israel. They would all signify a phase in the God's plan to redeem the world's occupants from the blight of sin, and they all pointed to the work of the Messiah who was at the very core of this plan.

The Passover laid the foundation for the other feasts, and was highly significant because not only did it look forward to the day when our Saviour would become our Passover sacrifice (1Corinthians 5:7), but it looked back to the day of Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Likewise, when we accept Christ as our Passover, we remember not only that He delivered us from the bondage of sin, but also that He shed His blood that we might be 'passed over' when judgment comes upon the world.

The Passover lamb was to be without defect, and was selected by the head of the household four days prior to its sacrifice in order that it might be set aside and protected from harm. Only the blood of a perfect sacrifice could save.

John 11:47-55 records that some days before the Passover, the authorities held a council in which it was determined that Jesus should 'die for the nation'. The record says that Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews for He knew that He had now been, as it were, set aside as the Passover Lamb. They just wanted Him dead, but He knew the time and the manner of His death must fulfil all righteousness - the Perfect Sacrifice.

March 11 **The Sign of the Blood (EG)**

Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs…The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you... Exodus 12:7-13.

It might have seemed a small thing to obey this instruction, but it wasn't. Many Israelites would heretofore have sought to identify with the Egyptians in order to ease their social stigma, but that would not save them this night. Now they must totally separate themselves from Egyptian society and identify fully with Israel and bondage.

Yet to be saved from this destruction required more than just being an Israelite, it required application of the blood. Similarly it is not enough simply to claim to be a Christian; the blood of Christ must be applied to our lives, or God will not see it and we will not be covered by it.

The blood on the doorposts and lintel prefigured the blood of Christ which He applied, on our behalf, to the upright and the crossbar of the cross. Here is a difference: the Jews needed to have the faith to apply the lamb's blood, yet now Christ has applied His own blood for us. Does that mean then we do not need faith? God forbid. Hebrews 11:6 says, "... *without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists…."* The faith we need is simply to reach out in all earnestness and claim the merits of Christ's blood.

And how is the blood applied? Well, where is the blood? It is on the cross. Therefore we must also place ourselves figuratively on the cross so that we are, as the Apostle Paul says, "...*crucified with Christ: and,"* he continues, "…*the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20).

March 12 **Christ Our Pillar (E)**

By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Exodus 13:21-22.

Have you ever been lost in a desert? Probably not, or you would not be reading this. We see a lot of survival shows on TV nowadays that teach us how to eat the inedible and drink the undrinkable. We learn how to avoid freezing and burning, and how to find our way to safety.

Food, water, shade, warmth, and direction are all truly vital to desert survival, and all these things God provided the Israelites for the forty years they spent in the wilderness. The food and water we shall deal with at other times, but the other three were all provided by Christ our Pillar. Why do I say Christ our Pillar? Because it is He who provides all that is essential to our physical and spiritual wellbeing.

The cloud during the day was not just a banner at the head of the column; it spread out as a canopy over the people providing shade and cool air to the weary travellers. At night it provided light and warmth so that they could travel or sleep in safety and comfort. Not only these, but it was their Compass, continually leading them in the direction they should go.

If we make the will of God supreme in our lives we will be similarly led. The way might be difficult at times, surrounded by enemies and not sure where we are in life. We have never been promised our walk will be easy, yet we may rest in the knowledge that on the rough path Jesus is there leading us toward the Promised Land by whatever route He chooses as best for us. By the pillar in the wilderness He is promising always to give us the shade of His covering hand, the light of His Word, and guidance to lead us home at last.

March 13 **The Red Sea (EF)**

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. Exodus 14:21-22.

This is not the first time we have seen waters divided. It happened at Creation when a new earth emerged, perfect and good in God's sight, from the midst of the waters. Now we see a new nation emerge from the waters; God's chosen people being led into a life of holiness. They went into the Red Sea a 'mixed multitude', and came out a nation, baptized as it were, into a new relationship with God.

We often find, as we become familiar with the Bible, that as things were in the past, so shall they be in the future. In today's reading we see a repeating of the dividing of the waters as God creates something new, this time a nation. This new nation will spend forty years in the desert learning what it means to be called God's 'beloved Son'. They will be sorely tested during that time, but at the end of forty years they will be a people who have finally learned what it meant when they had said, *"All that the Lord tells us to do, we will do"* (Exodus 24:3). At the end of the forty years the waters of the River Jordan will also be divided so that this people can cross on dry land into the territory that will become their inheritance. The refugee rabble will have been moulded into a disciplined nation that will march, as one man, around the city of Jericho, to do the work God has ordained for it to do.

Thus the wilderness sojourn was bookended by a parting of the waters, and with the emergence of Jacob's sons into a new life. Fifteen hundred years later the Messiah would also arise from Jordan's baptism to bring new life to the world. He too would enter the wilderness, and He too would bring down the walls of Satan's empire.

March 14 **The Lord Who Heals (FH)**

If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you. Exodus 15:26.

After crossing the Red Sea the Israelites turned inland and started walking. Three days later they were hot, dusty, weary and thirsty, but safely out of Egypt. And even better; here was a large body of water for drinking and washing.

But joy turned to disappointment when they found the water to be undrinkable. Now what to do? This was a disaster. But God knew what He was doing. He instructed Moses to throw a piece of wood into the water, and when he did so the water became drinkable. There was nothing in the wood; it was the Lord who did the miracle. God could have purified the water before their arrival, but He wanted to teach the people that He is the Lord who heals. As long as they obeyed Him, they would experience His healing hand. It is still the same today; when we obey Him, we are in His care.

Fifteen hundred years later the Lord who heals came to walk the dusty paths of Palestine. Not surprisingly, His important work was to bring healing to the people. Whole villages and communities were touched by His presence, so that after He had gone there was not one sick person among them. Not just physical healing, but the healing that comes from knowing we are right with God – that is being under God's care. This is how the Lord heals, because He has come to bring a kingdom, and in this kingdom there is no sickness and no sin.

The Lord's first miracle for the wilderness Israel was to turn undrinkable water into something fit for His new bride. So, when Jesus began His ministry, His first miracle was to turn 'that which was worse' into a nectar fit for a bride.

March 15 **Not By Bread Alone (FH)**

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death…" Exodus 16:2-3.

In today's reading the people have crossed the Red Sea and have gone into the wilderness for what is to be a time of testing by God and temptation by Satan. They do not know it yet, but they will wander this wilderness for forty years before they finally learn the lessons which will mould them into a people who will bring glory to God.

They have now been about a month in the wilderness, and they are beginning to realise the down side of leaving Egypt – the cupboard is bare. They are about to be put to the test; God does not want a nation of whiners. He needs to teach these ex-slaves how to become noble citizens of the Kingdom of God. He does it, in His infinite wisdom, not only by giving food, but also by teaching the sacredness of the Sabbath. Manna is introduced, but only in the keeping of the Sabbath rest can it be fully received. The Israelites are to learn that they shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3).

In an earlier reading (Genesis 46:2-4), we saw how the life of Christ on earth was anticipated in the history of the Israelites. Here is an example: Israel's first temptation was over appetite, and like Adam before them, Israel failed. Jesus lived out the life Israel should have lived, and, unlike His forebears, He overcame temptation, and in the process gave us the example we need for our own victory – *it is written.* He answered temptation with Scripture; in this case the very words used by Moses: *"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4).

…in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. Exodus 16:13-15.

For the entire forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, the people had sufficient to eat. On Fridays twice as much 'what is it?' fell so that there would be no need to gather it on the Sabbath. There was no natural explanation for the presence of the manna, and the Israelites were left in no doubt that it was provided by the direct intervention of God. This was to be a lesson to the people that God alone was their Provider and Sustainer. More than that, if they collected more than they needed, the extra went bad. Thus the people learnt day by day that God would always meet their needs, but not more than their needs. The lesson for us in this is quite evident: Andrew Carnegie, the great industrialist, once wrote, "the man who dies thus rich dies disgraced"[12].

Jesus taught the same lesson in the feeding of the five thousand. This was far more than a miracle, it was a demonstration that just as the manna came down from heaven to bring life to the Israelites, so He had come down from heaven to bring eternal life to all who would accept Him." *I am the living bread that came down from heaven, H*e said. *If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever"* (John 6:51).

In fact, He is saying that as without the manna in the wilderness the people would not have survived, so without Him there can be no eternal life, "*I tell you the truth,* He said, *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:53-54).

[12] Written in 1868 in a memo to himself. *"Andrew Carnegie Quotes." Quotes.net.* STANDS4 LLC, 2017. Web. 6 Feb. 2017. <http://www.quotes.net/quote/3066>.

March 17 Of Faith and Presumption (EFH)

The LORD answered Moses, "…Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" Exodus 17:5-7.

Here is Israel's second failure. They had been without water before, and God had miraculously provided it for them. But they had not yet learned that God could be trusted, so the next time they ran out of water they immediately presumed that God was out to fail them. This was a sin in God's sight because it meant that their basic assumption about God was that He would let them down. Presumption is Satan's counterfeit of faith. Faith is borne of belief; presumption is borne of unbelief. Faith accepts God's word; presumption demands proof. The Israelites had heard Moses say to Pharaoh, *"Israel is my firstborn son. Let my son go",* yet they cried out, even while under the protection of the fiery cloudy pillar, "*Is the Lord among us, or not?"* (Exodus 17:7).

This sin of Israel occurred when they had been in the wilderness about as long as Jesus had been when he faced His second temptation. Therefore it is consistent with the parallelism between the experiences of both Israel and Jesus that His second temptation should also be over presumption. Like the Israelites, Jesus had also heard the words, "*This is my beloved Son".* Now Satan wanted Him to get God to prove it. Satan quoted the Bible in this temptation, but he quoted only part of the passage, He omitted *"To keep thee in all thy ways"* (Psalm 91:11, Matthew 4:6). In other words, God gives his angels charge over us to keep us in the way He has chosen for us. It is not for us to presume the way God has chosen for us, it is for us to seek God's guidance as to the way He has chosen for us. Then we can follow it even amid difficulties because we know we have acted in faith.

"… I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. Exodus 17:6.

The Israelites' distrust of God was a great sin in His eyes. In fact, certain influential men were feeding the people a conspiracy theory that Moses planned to lead the people into the desert, and then let them die of thirst so that he could make off with all their possessions (see v.1-3). This incident is referred to, in Psalm 95:7-11, as the day the people tempted God, or as we might say today, they put God to the test.

Yet God, in His boundless mercy, did not destroy the people. Rather He led them to a great rock, and commanded Moses to take Aaron's shepherd's staff and use it to strike the rock. As soon as he did so water, clean, cool and refreshing, came bubbling from the rock in such abundance that there was sufficient for all the people and livestock for the entire time they remained encamped at that spot.

From that time on the Rock became the symbol of God as in Psalm 95:1, "*Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation."* Later, Jesus would also refer to Himself as the Rock when He said to the disciple Peter, "…*I tell you that you are Peter* [*Petros* – a moveable rock]*, and on this rock* [*Petra* – a large immovable rock] *I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18). Similarly, the Apostle Paul said regarding the Israelites, "*…they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ"* (1Corinthians 10:4). Today we may still come to the Rock and drink of its waters, for, as Jesus once said to a thirsty woman, "*whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:14).

March 19 **The Raised Hands (E)**

As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. Exodus 17:11-12.

There is much meaning in the outstretched hands. When the Amalekites threatened to destroy the fledgling nation of Israel, Moses sent Joshua with a force of untried men to fight them. He placed himself on top of a hill overlooking the field of battle, and stood holding his rod in both hands over his head (the rod was presumably horizontal with one hand holding each end). While he held up the rod the Israelites prevailed, but when he became tired and his arms dropped, the Amalekites prevailed. Therefore Aaron and Hur made Moses sit on a rock while they stood either side of him holding up his hands. This way Moses' hands were steady until the battle was won.

There is great significance in this event; the shape formed by Moses and the rod was that of a cross. As long as this position was maintained Joshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus) prevailed. Victory was possible only in the Cross. In the light of these passages, the picture of Jesus, lifted up, with arms outstretched, as though embracing the world, has become, to Christians, the essence of victorious Christianity. To the Amalekites the sight of Moses sitting on a rock with his hands in the air may have appeared foolish. But to the Israelites, so recently a class of slaves, it gave courage to defeat a warlike and battle-hardened army. Today the Cross is *"a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles"*. But for those who believe, the Cross is the power and the wisdom of God. *"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength"* (1Corinthians 1:23-25).

The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up…And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Exodus 19:20, 20:1-2.

When God came down onto Mt. Sinai to give the Ten Commandments, the people were forbidden to come up or even to touch the mountain lest the glory of God destroy them. Moses alone was to go up, and even he, when he came down forty days later, shone so brightly that he had to be veiled in order for the people to be able to look at him.

Yet God, in His love, wanted the people to be able to experience Him at a personal and human level, and the only way for Him to be able to do that was for God Himself to take on humanity and walk among us as one of us.

Thus, when Jesus ended His victorious forty-day wilderness conflict, he returned to the land of men and, as Matthew's record says, "*when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them…"* (Matthew 5:1-2).

The people could not sit at the feet of God on the mountain as He gave His great Law, but when Jesus went up into a mountain to give His great sermon there was no such restriction. Just as the Law of God is a transcript of the character of God, so the Sermon on the Mount is a transcript of the character of Christ. In fact, the sermon on the Mount, while teaching Grace, is also an exposition on the law. "*You, have heard it said of old"*, Jesus said, quoting one of the Ten Commandments; "*But I say to you….*" In this way Jesus explained the true meaning of the law, and a great truth emerged; grace does not replace the law, it amplifies it.

March 21 **The Angel (AH)**

"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. Exodus 23:20-21.

Who is this Angel who would bring us to the place God has prepared? The words bring to mind John 14:3, "*… if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* Exodus 23:20 refers to the physical Canaan, and the Angel is Christ in the pillar of cloud and fire. In John 14:3 Jesus promises the heavenly Canaan where He, the devoted Bridegroom, will go to prepare a home for His bride.

If the Angel is Christ, it seems strange to read that He will not forgive our rebellion. Yet in the light of the above, it really makes a lot of sense. After all, which man wants a rebellious bride? Would she be happy in the home prepared for her? Sin can be forgiven because it can be repented of, and repentance is true sorrow for sin, not just for the consequences of the sin, but for the fact of the sin. But rebellion is bigger than that, it is the final decision to turn away from God and follow our own way.

However, these are not the reason given for not rebelling against the Angel. It is, we are told, because *"My Name is in Him".* What does that mean? In the Bible name is character; and when God's name is in the Angel, it is His character that is there. When God instructed the priests how to bless the people, He taught them *The Aaronic Blessing* (Numbers 6:24-26), and then said, *"So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them"* (v.27). Today God wishes His perfect character to be upon all people that they too might be one in mind and Spirit with Him. This is how it will be for those who enter the place He has prepared.

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." Exodus 24:8.

The Ten Commandments have been written by God on stone tablets and given to Moses. Now Moses has descended the mountain and written down all God has told him to write. These writings have become the Book of the Covenant, the first part of our Bible ever written (Exodus 20:22-23:33). After assembling the people, Moses opened the book and read it out loud to them, and when the people heard it they said, *"Everything the LORD has said we will do".*

A covenant between God and the people has been agreed and it must be ratified by the shedding of blood. Moses takes the blood from the sacrifice and sprinkles it over the book and the people saying, "*This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words"* (see Hebrews 9:19).

But the people did not do everything the Lord said, and the covenant failed. Now a failed covenant becomes obsolete and disappears forever (Hebrews 8:13), and a new covenant must be made also to be sealed in blood. Jesus made that covenant when, on the night He was betrayed, He took wine and said, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".* Jesus' choice of words seems deliberate, as though He wants us to understand that the old is replaced by the new. His words may have also been familiar to the disciples for another reason: a covenant was also made with wine at an *erusin,* or engagement ceremony, in which the bride and groom would pledge themselves to one another. Following the *erusin*, the groom would return to his father's home and prepare a place for his bride that where he lived, she would live also. Sound familiar?

March 23 Of Privileges and Punishments (EFH)

Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. Exodus 24:9-10.

Shortly after receiving the Ten Commandments, Moses was again summoned to meet God in the mountain. He was to bring with him Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the three senior priests, and the seventy elders who represented the twelve tribes of Israel. These could watch from a distance, but only Moses could come into the direct presence of God.

One leader, three favoured individuals, twelve tribes, and seventy elders; this was the organisational structure of Israel. Jesus also used it to build His fledgling Christian church: one Leader, three favoured disciples, twelve disciples, and seventy evangelists who would no doubt become future elders of the church.

The event described in today's reading prefigures the scene at the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter, James and John were summoned to observe Jesus' meeting with Moses and Elijah. Like Aaron, who soon afterwards denied his Lord in the matter of the golden calf, Peter would also soon deny Jesus. Like the brothers Nadab and Abihu, whose presumption later cost them their lives, James and his brother John would also offend God in their presumptuous request to be exalted in heaven.

This teaches an important lesson about God's dealings with men: His special favour today does not give us license to take Him for granted tomorrow. That is why He told Moses to say to Aaron after the death of Nadab and Abihu: *"By those who come near to me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified"* (Leviticus 10:3 NKJV).

March 24 **The Sanctuary (EH)**

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. Exodus 25:8-9.

Which pagan deity ever condescended to make his dwelling on earth among men? Yet it is with us that God wants to reside, not out of condescension, but out of choice. Even more than that, He does not miraculously produce a magnificent palace, but asks us to make His house with our own hands out of locally available materials. The only stipulation is that it must be made exactly according to the specifications He gives us.

It would seem then that it was more important to God that the design blueprint be meticulously followed than it was to have it made from the most costly materials. Why? Because the tabernacle was more than a residence, it was to play a vital role in man's redemption. In fact the tabernacle, its furniture, and its services, all foreshadowed the Messiah and His ministry on our behalf. As we consider the Sanctuary, we will keep finding Jesus there.

The Sanctuary is Jesus, for Jesus is our Sanctuary; He is perfect and He is flawless. Therefore it was vital that the copy of the heavenly Sanctuary also be perfect and flawless. Jesus lived His entire earthly life without sin, without any imperfection that would mar His sacrifice for our sins. Thus shoddy workmanship, or mistakes in its construction would make the tabernacle unfit to represent Christ.

This gives us insight into the reason for Jesus' indignation when He drove the money changers out of the Temple (Matthew 21:13). By misusing the Temple, they had misrepresented the work and character of the Messiah. It is a wondrous privilege that God chose to dwell with mankind; how careful we must be not to misrepresent Him.

March 25 **The Eternal Flame (EH)**

Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning. Exodus 27:20

The Lampstand in the tabernacle, known as the *Menorah*, consisted of seven branches. When the priest trimmed the wicks he would make sure that they were never all extinguished at the same time. The Menorah could never go out for it represented Christ "*the true light that gives light to every man"* (John 1:9).

The Menorah also symbolised the Holy Scriptures which were described by David as *"a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"* (Psalm 119:105). Both Christ and His Word are eternal. They stand forever; they never can, and never will, change or be extinguished, for God says, "*I am the LORD, I change not"* (Malachi 3:6 KJV).

When God established the nation of Israel, it was His purpose that it should be a beacon of light to the surrounding peoples who would then see the way the people lived and worshipped, and say *"Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people*" (Deuteronomy 4:6). Thus the knowledge of God would gradually disseminate throughout the world so that, "*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2:14).

It is exactly the same today; God desires His people to live such lives that all who see them should wish to know more of God and His love. That is why Jesus reminded us that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). That does not mean we ourselves are a source of light, but just as the moon has no light of its own, yet reflects the brightness of the sun, so our lives should be such that we reflect the light of Christ to others enabling them to see God and His goodness. That way, we lead others to give glory to God.

March 26 **The Priestly Garments (EGH)**

And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. Ex. 28:2-3 KJV.

Exodus 28 describes the garments to be worn by Aaron and his sons as priests of the Sanctuary. Notice the care and attention to be given to the making of this garment, the intricate detail in its design. Why did the priest wear such magnificent apparel? Was it just to give him 'glory and beauty', or 'dignity and honour' as the NIV says? Maybe so, for that is one of the reasons people wear uniforms.

I chose the KJV rendition of this verse because it better captures the truth that these garments also represent the glory and beauty of Jesus; they represent His glorious perfection and the beauty of His character; they represent His righteousness.

God promises His people that they will be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. As such, they also will receive special garments woven with the thread of Christ's glory and beauty. When John saw the redeemed in heaven wearing white robes, his angel explained to him, "*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Revelation 7:13-14).

We may ask how washing a robe in blood makes it white; the answer is that the shedding of Jesus' blood at Calvary atones for our sin and removes its guilty stains. Only blood can remove the stain of sin. When we repent and confess our sins to God, regardless of how bad they are, He has promised to forgive us and clothe us in a new garment, one that symbolises the glory and beauty of our heavenly High Priest.

March 27 **The Master Craftsman (E)**

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts…Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you… Exodus 31:1-6.

If we read through the instructions given for the tabernacle and its services (Exodus 25-31) we find that God demands from men and women a standard of craftsmanship such as is found only among the very top artisans in the world today - perfection, no less. Why did God expect such high standards from a people who until recently were slaves?

God knew that there was no way this poor downtrodden people would have the skills necessary to produce such quality work. Therefore He selected certain people and filled them with His Spirit that they might have the skills needed.

There is a vital lesson for us here: In 1 Corinthians 3:16 the Apostle Paul points out that the Holy Spirit also dwells in us. "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ...For God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple*." Here is a challenging thought; should my own body temple then be anything less than perfect? Yet I am flawed and sinful, I have scars, deformities and bad thoughts. How can God's Spirit possibly dwell in me?

Praise God there is a solution. Just as Bezalel and his workers were able to make the tabernacle fit for God to dwell in, so God has provided a Master Craftsman who will fashion our body temple into a house fit for a holy God to dwell in. When we invite Jesus into our hearts, He will go to work on us to fashion us into the temple He wishes us to be. To be sure the process will be painful at times, but He is looking at the final product, a jewel for His kingdom.

March 28 **Divine Sabbath Rest (EGH)**

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites,… 'Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you…For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD…It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever…"*Exodus 31:12-17.

Today's reading reminds us that the Sabbath is holy. I say reminds us because this is not the first time we have heard it. God first informed us of the sacredness of the Sabbath hours at the Creation (Genesis 3:1-3) making it a memorial of that awesome event. Again God enclosed the Sabbath in the heart of the Ten Commandments making it a perpetual reminder of His Creatorship. Now, while God gives His people instruction as to the design and construction of His Sanctuary – His Holy Place, He also includes the Sabbath in that design – His Holy Time.

We are beginning to see how the function and detail of the Sanctuary, God's Holy Place, anticipates Jesus the Messiah, so it comes as no real surprise to hear the angel Gabriel say to young Mary, "…*the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1:35). Yes, Jesus is holy too. Now we have a Holy Person, a Holy Place, and Holy Time. Just as the function and detail of the earthly Sanctuary anticipates the life and ministry of Christ, so the weekly Sabbath rest anticipates Christ our divine Sabbath Rest. Just as the weekly Sabbath offers physical and spiritual rest, so Jesus said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you…and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29).

It is highly significant, although often overlooked by Christians, that just as God rested on the Sabbath of Creation, so, following the crucifixion, Christ rested the Sabbath in the tomb, the Rest of Redemption. He is indeed our Sabbath Rest.

March 29 **Overcoming Temptation (FH)**

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt… and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." Exodus 32:7-8.

Now Israel has sinned again, this time over worship. They have made an idol and are worshipping the wretched thing while Moses is in Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, one of which prohibits idol worship.

Satan has made it his primary objective to corrupt worship, and he could not wait to find a way to get the Israelites into the same. In the days of Nimrod, the mighty hunter, Satan established a counterfeit system of worship based on idolatry, fear, works, appeasement, and human sacrifice.

Now Satan has spectacularly succeeded in luring Israel into just this worship, but he seeks far more than just Israel. His scheme is to turn the entire world away from worshipping the true God. But the only way he can do that is by getting the Son of God to worship him too. If the Son of God were to worship him, Satan would be able to consider himself as God and claim the universe as his. This is what his malignant heart has lusted for ever since corruption was first found in him. At that time he boasted, *"I will exalt my throne above the stars of God…I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High"* (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Israel's third test became Christ's third temptation. But Satan is no match for the Son of Man who promptly sent him packing, again with the aid of that sword of the Word, *It is written*. Christ's victory is our victory: "*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted"* (Heb. 2:18 KJV). Now we too can overcome.

"O LORD," [Moses] *said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to…wipe them off the face of the earth'?* Exodus 32:11-12.

When Moses returned from the mountain with the Ten Commandments in hand, he was shocked to find the people revelling naked before a golden calf. God's response was swift and decisive, *"Stand aside while I destroy them all,"* He told Moses, *"Then I will make you into a great nation"* (v.10).

Moses might have been well honoured by such an arrangement. But what about all God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? More importantly, how would the nations regard the God of Israel? Is He a tyrant who wipes people out at the least provocation? Israel would then be a nation no different from any other, one that sought to appease an angry and unmerciful God. It was these thoughts going through Moses' head, not thoughts of self-aggrandisement, which prompted him to stand between God and the people.

In becoming intercessor for the people, Moses foreshadowed the One who was to become Intercessor for the whole world. The Apostle John describes Him in words easy for the modern mind to grasp, "*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1John 2:1 KJV).

As Moses pled on behalf of a corrupt people, so Jesus presents the cases of all who come to Him in penitence. As Moses' intercession saved the lives of all the people, so we may have full assurance that we will be acquitted. After all, not only is Christ our Defence Attorney, He is also our Judge (John 5:22).

…Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." Exodus 32:30-32.

It costs something to make atonement for someone. Moses was willing to pay whatever price in order to restore the relationship between God and the Israelites. What a price it was too! He was willing to have his name removed from the book containing the names of God's elect. It is a major issue to have one's name removed from this book, for it is only those whose names are in it who will enter God's Kingdom (Daniel 12:1; Revelation 20:15, 21:27).

Moses was willing to give up his place in heaven that the people he loved might be there. What love was this that would give up so much for such a corrupt and unlovable people? Yet in this selfless act Moses was again a Christ-type, for of Jesus it is written,"*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:7-8).

Jesus' death reveals to us that His own Name had been blotted out of the Book of Life that our 'great sin' might be atoned for. Did Jesus do this for us because we are worthy of it? Certainly not! For we are no better than those Israelites. He did it because "*being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!"* (Philippians 2:6-8).

*Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast…*Exodus 34:25a.

During the week prior to the Passover the people were to remove every trace of yeast from their homes. Today, devout Jews will ceremonially burn any yeast found in their home the day before Passover. So, what's wrong with yeast? Nothing inherently; it's a good food source. The reason for its ritual contamination is that its permeating action is just the way sin works.

As anyone who has made bread knows, when a small amount of yeast is added to the dough and left for a while, the bread will rise. Similarly even what appears to be the smallest of sins, if harboured, can permeate the soul resulting in eternal damage.

The Apostle Paul, when he learnt that a sinful practice was being tolerated in the fledgling Corinthian church wrote, "*Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed"* (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

Yeast was not to be used in a sacrifice because the sacrifice was to be faultless. In that way it foreshadowed the sacrifice of the One whose sinless perfection alone could atone for the sins of the world. That Sinless One was Jesus of Nazareth. Significantly, there were three witnesses to Christ's innocence on the day of His crucifixion, Judas (Matthew 27:4), Pilate (John 18:38), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:41).

Just as the faithful Israelite family members would carefully sweep out their home before the Passover in order to remove every trace of sin, so we should carefully sweep the corners of our heart that no yeast of sin might be found there.

…do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning. Exodus 34:25b.

Several times we find the injunction not to let the sacrifice remain until the next day, but instead to burn what is not eaten. Is there a reason for that? Several probably: that first Passover the people had no time to sit down for a meal because they had to travel in haste. Exodus 29:34 also says it should not be eaten the next day because it is holy. In the warm Mediterranean climate meat cannot be left overnight without its becoming infected with disease. How many people today have received a dose of *Salmonella* from eating meat left too long out of the fridge?

Once a human heart stops beating, the body cells begin to die because they no longer receive oxygen and can no longer excrete carbon dioxide. The time taken for decay to take place depends, to a large extent, upon the ambient temperature. Jewish tradition says that the human soul hovers near the deceased for up to 3 days[13]. Therefore, Jews in Jesus' day believed that there may still be a possibility that a return to life is possible within three days. Maybe this is the reason Jesus deliberately waited until Lazarus had been dead four days before raising him to life. Jesus' own body was entombed immediately after His death. He then rested in the coolness of the tomb for the Sabbath, and was raised early Sunday morning. In this way, He fulfilled David's prophecy of Psalm 16:10, "...*nor will you let your Holy One see decay".*

There is further insight here: normally someone crucified might not die for some days. Yet Jesus' death was sacrificial, and the law forbade the sacrifice to remain until the next day. However, when Jesus died that same day, His body was immediately removed from the cross, prepared for burial, and placed in the tomb. Even in death Jesus fulfilled the Law because He, and the Law, were both holy.

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[13] Raphael, Simcha Paull (2009). *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* (second edition). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p. 140.

April 3 Forty Days and Forty Nights (EF)

Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. Exodus 34:28.

The time period of forty days is found frequently in the Bible. It seems to be associated with a period of trial or testing. Occasionally it is written as *forty days and forty nights*, an expression that seeks our attention because there is a common thread running through each occasion it is used. There are only four men in the entire Bible whose lives include these words. Noah, Moses and Elijah were three men who lived out, in a special way, aspects of the life and mission of the fourth, Jesus Christ. All had forty day and forty night intimacies with God. For forty days and forty nights Noah and his family were lifted up high above the earth under God's protective hand. Moses twice went up into the mountain of God for forty days and forty nights to receive God's written covenant, the Ten Commandments. Elijah too made a forty day and forty night journey to the same mountain to spend time in person with God. Neither Moses nor Elijah ate anything for the entire period, and given the cataclysm taking place on the earth at that time of the flood, food probably was not high on Noah's agenda either.

These three men are among the major Christ-types in the Bible. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Antitype, Jesus of Nazareth, also fasted for forty days and forty nights. Maybe Jesus too went up into the same mountain to spend time in the presence of His heavenly Father. Maybe He, just like the Israelites, experienced His great temptation at the base of the mountain after He had descended. We are not told.

We still have *forty day* trials today. We may not climb mountains, but we may still be lifted up to the throne of God, and He will allow us into His presence.

April 4 **The Blessing (G)**

And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them. Exodus 39:43.

This passage brings us almost to the end of the book of Exodus. Chapters 35-39 give detailed instructions for the construction and assembly of the tabernacle prior to concluding with the words of our text for today.

Why was it crucial that the workmanship be so flawless? Because the tabernacle, in its entirety as well as in its individual items and services, was a type of the Messiah who would one day come to fulfil the promises in them. The Messiah, when He came, was to be flawless in character and in behaviour, *"tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore every object made to represent Him had also to be flawless. Moses, knowing this, would not pass any workmanship that was less than perfect.

This passage may also seem vaguely familiar. Could it be that it reminds us of Genesis 1:31 when at the Creation*, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good"?* What God does is always perfect, and so, as was the work of Creation, so must be the work of Redemption. God looks upon it and sees that it is very good.

Furthermore, God crowned His Creation with a blessing. He set aside a holy time for mankind to enjoy in memorial to the Creation. Likewise Moses' inspection of the tabernacle also concludes with a blessing upon the people. It seems then that a blessing follows a completed work. It is not surprising therefore that at the final great completed work Christ also gives a blessing. His last words recorded in the New Testament are a blessing upon those who will go through the gates of the Holy City (Revelation 22:14). They too are the fruit of His very good work.

April 5 **The Eternal Flame (EGH)**

The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out. Leviticus 6:12-13.

Construction of the new wilderness sanctuary is complete; the various articles are in place. The work is perfect. Now all is in readiness for the sanctuary to be dedicated to God and the first sacrifices offered. Aaron the high priest stands before the Altar of Sacrifice, the ram slain for the burnt offering lies atop the wood laid in order upon the altar. He lifts his voice in blessing upon the people who wait expectantly to see what great things may happen this auspicious day. Suddenly a glory from heaven shines upon the assembly, and a mighty bolt of fire comes down striking the ram and setting it into a blaze of fire. The Sanctuary has been dedicated, and God has accepted the offering (Leviticus 9:1-24).

That day in the wilderness God sent a fire onto the earth that was never to be extinguished. The priests were to attend it daily removing ashes and adding new wood so that it would remain a perpetual sign of God's presence. It is said that this fire remained alight until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple one thousand years later. From that day in the wilderness, every morning and every evening, the priest would select a blemish-free yearling lamb as a burnt offering on behalf of the people. Thereafter there was never a time, day or night, when atonement was not available, when sin was not covered by the blood of the lamb.

Yet this gift was only the shadow of a better covenant in which God would again send fire from heaven, this time upon the disciples of Jesus. They would keep it alight it until they had carried it to the ends of the earth so that those of every nation who believe may be covered by the blood of the Lamb.

April 6 **Eating The Offering (EG)**

When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry…and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the LORD…" Leviticus 10:16-17.

The entire chapter needs to be read to understand the scene properly. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, have died for drunkenly offering unsanctified incense in the Holy Place. When Moses also discovered that the remaining sons had not eaten the goat of the sin offering that day he was very upset because by not eating it they had not taken upon themselves the guilt of the people, and therefore had not made atonement for the people. In short, the goat had died for nothing. Aaron explained, in effect, that his sense of his own sin was so great that he could not also take upon himself the sins of others.

What an amazing insight into the work of the priest. When an animal is brought to the altar as a sin offering the priest confesses the sins of the people over it and thus transfers their sin to the animal. The animal is then sacrificed in place of the sinner. Instead of burning up the animal completely, the priest is to eat parts of its flesh, and by so doing he takes upon himself the sin of the people.

We have seen how the sacrificial animal is a Christ-type; now we also see Jesus in the work of the priest. For He is also our heavenly High Priest who takes upon Himself the sins of the world. The book of Hebrews explains this work, especially Chapters 8 to 10. There, we are told, Jesus has entered heaven itself to present His own blood on our behalf once and for all time. The passage concludes by urging us to come into His presence in the full confidence of His acceptance, for He has shed His blood for us, borne our sin, and has washed us with the pure water of His life (Hebrews 10:19-22).

…Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean…And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water: As for the living bird, he shall…dip [it]*…in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times…and shall let the living bird loose into the open field*. Leviticus 14:1-7 KJV.

Have you ever noticed how readily Jesus would heal the leprosy sufferer who came to him for cleansing? For other requests He might challenge their faith, but not so leprosy; "Be clean" was always His immediate response.

Leprosy commences its subtle work by attacking peripheral nerves leading the victim to injure themselves often without knowing it. Similarly, sin works insidiously within us, leaving us its victim before we are even aware. When we come to Christ to confess our sin, His response is immediate, "Be clean".

Our reading for today describes a part of the process the priest would follow in order to declare a leprosy victim clean. One clean bird is sacrificed under running water so that its blood mingles with the water. Then another living bird is dipped in the blood-water solution, and 'sprinkled' over the person seven times before being set free.

This ceremony beautifully symbolises the death, burial and rebirth of one who has come under the influence of sin, but seeks to return to God. It foreshadows the work of Jesus Christ, who came by the waters of baptism and the blood of Calvary (1John 5:6) to cleanse us of the leprosy of sin, so that like the banished leprosy victim, we may again come into the presence of God.

April 8 **Two Goats (E)**

And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering. Leviticus 16:8-9 English Standard Version.

The Day of Atonement is the most solemn day in the Jewish religious calendar, for on this day the earthly sanctuary is to be cleansed. It is to be purified of all the sins of the past year so that they are no more. Two virtually identical goats are presented before the Lord for Him to choose their fate. One is chosen to be sacrificed as atonement for sin and its blood presented before the Mercy Seat. This goat represents Christ. Strange, isn't it, that Jesus is symbolised as a goat – "Behold the Goat of God who takes away the sins of the world". Sounds almost blasphemous, doesn't it?

Yom Kippur is a festival designed to deal with the sin problem. Yes, Christ's sacrifice provides atonement for our sins. But just as a certain drug may cure malaria, the nasty little parasite that causes malaria is still at large. So our sins are forgiven, but that malevolent parasite, Satan, is still at large. Jesus came, not only to forgive our sins, but also to rid the universe of Sin. How does He do it? By becoming Sin! In 2Corinthians 5:21, Paul wrote, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God".* This is deep! When Jesus bore our sins He became Sin - and the Father turned away! That is why He is symbolised here by a goat, because the first goat bore the sin of the people.

As the annual Passover prefigured the atoning sacrifice of Christ, so *Yom Kippur* prefigures the day when Christ our High Priest will cleanse the Heavenly Sanctuary of all Sin and place it on the head of the second goat, Azazel, to be permanently removed from the sight of God and His redeemed. Then the entire universe will be clean forever.

April 9 **Azazel (EH)**

But the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. Leviticus 16:10 ESV.

I have intentionally chosen a version that leaves the word *Azazel* untranslated from the Hebrew. There is much debate, often acrimonious, over the meaning and identity of Azazel best avoided in a devotional.[14] Therefore, let me humbly suggest that it is Sin that is sent away into the wilderness, and leave the details to the theologians.

Many Christians see in the Day of Atonement festival a type of the scene in Pilate's judgment hall when Barabbas and Jesus were presented to the people for them to choose who would die and who would be released. It is an alluring thought; after all, they are both condemned and both have very similar names, Jesus the Son of God, and Jesus (according to some manuscripts) the Son of the Father. Yet there are sufficient difficulties beyond the scope of a devotional that may deter us from going too far with this line of thought.

What is significant for us is that the One declared innocent three times that day was the One chosen as the sacrifice. Jesus was condemned to death so that Barabbas could be set free. Yet I realise it is me who should have been standing there that day; it is my cross that lies in wait to do its work. Barabbas is me; I am guilty, I am condemned, and I deserve my punishment. Yet I will not be placed on that cross because an innocent Man has taken it upon Himself to stand in my place. What kind of Love is this that One should do such a thing? Barabbas stands for you and me. Because of Christ's sacrifice our sins will one day be taken out into the wilderness of the universe and obliterated. Then shall the Israel of God be clean.

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[14] *Azazel* is usually translated as 'scapegoat', a term coined by William Tyndale in his 1530 Bible. It meant literally 'the goat that escapes'. Today the word refers to someone who is made to take the blame. This raises an interesting question as to who is truly the scapegoat; is it the innocent one who is put to death? Or the guilty one that escapes?

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies… These are the LORD's appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times.'" Leviticus 23:1-4.

Leviticus 23 is the chapter that describes the seven[15] annual festivals that comprised the Jewish religious calendar. Although the sacrificial offering formed the basis for the peoples' worship, the seven festivals gave it structure, system, and a deeper meaning. They were designed by God to help the people understand His overall plan for the removal of sin and the restoration of mankind to His image. Each festival unfolded an act in the drama of the conflict between good and evil, and each festival was a type and shadow of the reality in heaven as God engages on our behalf to rid the universe of the sin problem.

At the centre of this work is Jesus Christ; every aspect of the sanctuary service points to Him. He is not only our Sacrifice, but He is also our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary of which the earthly tabernacle was just a model. Each festival reveals a different phase in His ministry on our behalf; the first four festivals were celebrated in the first and third months of the year, and the last three in the seventh month. The first four all met their fulfilment in Christ's first advent; the last three are being played out in the events surrounding His second advent.

It is no longer necessary for us to observe the festivals today, for type and antitype met at Calvary's Cross. However, they are still important in that they help us understand God's plan of salvation. Over the next week we shall look at each festival and follow the work of Jesus our great Sacrifice and our great High Priest.

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[15] Other commentators list the number of 'set', or 'appointed', feasts (Numbers 29:39) as 3, 5 or 7. The three harvest festivals were designated *chag,* pronounced 'haj', meaning pilgrimage), and required all Jewish men to travel to Jerusalem. The generic name for all the set festivals is *Mo'ed.* Whether or not there are 5, 6, or 7 feasts depends upon how one interprets the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasted for seven days.

The LORD's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. Leviticus 23:5.

We have already referred to the Passover on several occasions, so are familiar with its significance. However, there are still lessons to be learned from this powerful ceremony of which the Apostle Paul wrote, "*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed"* (1Corinthians 5:7). Here are some ways the Passover foreshadows the crucifixion:

- Christ was 'set apart' four days earlier (Exodus 12:3-6; John 11:49-53),
- Christ died on the 14th day of the first month (John 19:14)
- none of His bones was broken (John 19:36),
- He was introduced to the nation as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Exodus 12:3; John 1:29),
- He was without blemish (1Peter 1:19),
- His flesh was to be eaten (Exodus 12:7, John 6:51)
- His blood was applied to the cross (Exodus 12:22-23)

It took faith to obey the Passover instructions. A lamb was precious to a poor slave family, and to slaughter it and publicly to apply its blood to the door frame tested their resolve to obey His instruction and believe His promise. The Passover was also to be a continual reminder from whence they had come. As they slew the Passover lamb each year they would never forget their deliverance from bondage (Deuteronomy 7:8).

It takes the same faith today to apply the Lamb's blood to the doorposts of our lives. Maybe God intends it that way, for we too have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and it is God's plan that we should ever keep our sights focused on Calvary that we may never forget from whence we have come.

April 12 Festival 2, Unleavened Bread (EH)

And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. Leviticus 23:6 (NKJV)

The day of the Passover was also the first day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. The festival began on the 14th Nisan toward the evening with the slaughter of the Passover lamb to be eaten with bread made without yeast. The Passover was to be without yeast because the Israelites were to leave Egypt at a moment's notice with insufficient time for the bread to rise. Yeast, given time, permeates the dough in much the same way that sin, once added, permeates the human soul.

Now, following the sacrifice of the unblemished lamb, God's people must eat no yeast for a full seven days. This week their thoughts are to be on the significance of the sacrifice made for them, their deliverance from slavery, how they can best honour their Deliverer, and living their new life as a free people.

The Feast of Unleavened bread anticipated the day when Christ our Passover would die, be laid in the tomb, and rise again as the firstfruits of the great heavenly harvest. His sacrifice, made so that we can, as it were, be born again - as though we had never sinned - to look forward to a new life in Christ. Hence the unleavened bread.

Of course we are not good at remaining free of sin while the tempter is still around. It seems no time at all until we are again imbibing that yeast. Back to the Cross we go in a daily walk with God, daily learning, daily growing closer to Christ - until by God's grace there will come another festival, festival six, the Day of Atonement, when Christ will drive all sin out into an uninhabited land so that it can never come back.

When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. Leviticus 23:10-11.

The Firstfruits festival was held on the sixteenth day of the first month. At this time the early grain of the harvest was beginning to ripen, and the people would offer to God a sheaf of the first ripe grains.

In the year Christ died the Passover was sacrificed on a Friday. Jesus died at the same hour of the day in which the lamb was offered, and His body was placed in the tomb shortly before the Sabbath commenced (see Luke 23:53-56). As at the Creation, so Christ rested on the Sabbath of redemption.

In the early morning of the sixteenth day, the day after the Sabbath, Christ arose from death and became, as the Apostle Paul puts it, "*the firstfruits of them that slept"* (1Cor 15:20). He then explains why: "*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming"* (verses 21-23).

The festival of the Firstfruits was designed by God to teach the people not only to thank Him for grain to eat, but to look forward to the day when Christ our Passover would become the firstfruits of all who die in Him. Because He lives we have full confidence in the certainty of the resurrection harvest; whether our 'sleep' occurs at the beginning, or at the end, of earth's history, we have the blessed hope of the resurrection on that great harvest day.

April 14 Festival 4, The Feast of Weeks (EH)

From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. Leviticus 23:15-16.

Seven weeks after the offering of the Firstfruits, or Wave-sheaf, was the celebration of the full harvest. This was a special festival which required all Jewish men to travel to Jerusalem to worship there. This festival is better known among Christians today by its Greek name, the Feast of Pentecost.

After His resurrection Jesus remained forty days with the disciples, thus at His ascension there were 10 days remaining until the Feast of Weeks. By that time the disciples had grown from 12 to120, a tenfold increase, and were no longer the quarrelsome bunch of early days, but like the grain of the harvest, had matured into a united and cohesive body of men and women ready for the work Jesus had for them to do.

Jesus frequently likened His work on earth to that of a farmer. In His famous parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-9), He explained the scattered seed as the Word of God which, when planted in good ground, produces a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.

On the fiftieth day after the Resurrection, the Day of Pentecost, an event occurred which was to change the world; the Spirit of God was poured out on that group of humble believers, and they went out to proclaim the Word of God with a power the momentum of which has not ceased to this day. That day alone three thousand souls from all nations were baptized, and the growth has continued so that today the number is estimated to be over two billion, and still the harvest is being garnered.

April 15 Festival 5, The Feast of Trumpets (EH)

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Leviticus 23:23-24.

The last three festivals occurred in the seventh month. The Feast of Trumpets, *Rosh Hashanah* today, fell on the first day of the month which was also known as New Year's Day. Why? Because the religious calendar differed by six months from the civil calendar. This was not a harvest festival and therefore did not require the men to come to Jerusalem.

One should not think of the trumpet as a brass instrument, for it was the *shofar*, the ram's horn that was blown. Its call was to bring the people to repentance and self-examination prior to the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the month.

The Feast of Trumpets prefigures the time when the lives of all people come into review before their Creator. According to the Talmud[16] heavenly books are opened on that day, and those whose names are found in the Book of Life are sealed there. Those whose names are not there are given ten days, until the Day of Atonement, in which to search their hearts, repent and make themselves right with God. Thus for the saved the final judgment will be a vindication rather than an examination.

The Feast of Trumpets helps us understand that before the final judgment there will be a time when all whose names are not in the Book of Life will come in review before God. Then, when all names have been reviewed, Christ will return in power and glory to vindicate the righteous and destroy the unsaved. Those who have read the prophecies well understand that we are now in this 'Time of the End' and as the Day of Judgment approaches we must search our hearts and make right all known wrongs against God and neighbour.

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[16]See for example, *Babylonian Talmud, Book 2: Tracts Erubin, Shekalim, Rosh Hashana*, tr. by Michael L. Rodkinson, [1918], Section: New Year, Chapter 1, page 26. www.sacred-texts.com.

April 16 Festival 6, The Day of Atonement (EH)

The LORD said to Moses, "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. Leviticus 23:26-28.

Ask any devout Jew to explain *Yom Kippur,* the Day of Atonement, to you, and besides telling you it is the holiest day of the year, and the importance of repentance and forgiveness, he will tell you of the five things they will not do on that day: they will not eat or drink, wash, wear leather shoes, wear perfume or makeup, or have sexual relations.

Jews link these prohibitions to the Fall when man first became separated from God[17]. In short, by abstaining from these, they would seek to emulate Adam and Eve before the Fall, as well as to atone for the loss of Eden. In this way the Day of Atonement is the day that restores man to his original relationship with God.

It was over appetite that the holy pair was evicted from Eden; thus it is appropriate that the Day of Atonement be a day of denial, fasting and prayer. But when *Yom Kippur* is over and the sun has set, the people, once again in right standing with God, will joyfully gather to break their fast.

When our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, completes His work in the heavenly sanctuary He will don the garments of *the King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (Revelation 19:11-16), and return to judge the earth, for it will be the day of the great antitypical *Yom Kippur*. Sin is atoned for, Eden restored, and now the invitation to celebrate goes out: "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come… Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb"* (v. 7-9).

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[17] For further explanation, see, for example, *Mail-Jewish Digest,* Volume 37, No. 16, Article The Inuyim of Yom Kippur & the Expulsion from Eden, by Avi I Rabinowitz, September, 2002.http://www.ottmall.com/mj_ht_arch/.

April 17 Festival 7, The Feast of Tabernacles (EH)

So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days…you are to…rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Leviticus 23:39-40.

This is the only set festival in which God instructs the people to rejoice. Why? Because now God and man are reconciled; now God again dwells among man, as it were, as He did with Adam and Eve. For this reason many believe that Jesus was born at this time, for the Scripture says, "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, 'God with us'."* (Matthew 1:23).

The Feast of Tabernacles, being a harvest festival, required the people to come to Jerusalem to worship. They were to make shelters for themselves and remain in them for the seven days of the festival. A part of the ceremony included a deeply significant ritual which, by the time of Jesus, had been obscured by tradition. Each day of the feast the priest would go to the Gihon Spring and collect a pitcher of water and bring it to the temple. At the temple a conduit had been constructed next to the altar that ran down through the city to the Kidron Valley. Into this conduit the priest would pour the water, along with a pitcher of sacrificial wine, so that the two liquids mingled as they ran down the conduit and out to the valley.

John 7:37-38 records that Jesus was present at this festival, and was among the crowd as the water and the wine flowed. Knowing that they symbolised the blood and water that were so soon to flow from His own body, He, unable to remain silent, cried out so that all could hear, "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him".* On this day God dwelt among His people, and His people knew it not.

April 18 **Bread and Frankincense (E)**

And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof; two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the LORD. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon [each] row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, [even] an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Leviticus 24:5-7 KJV.

On the north side of the Holy Place was the table of showbread. Each Sabbath twelve fresh loaves were placed in two piles of six on the table. On top of each pile was placed a golden vessel containing pure frankincense[18]. Frankincense was one of the four spices used to make up the incense that was burned daily in the temple (Exodus 30:34-38), but was placed alone in its purest form on the showbread.

The amount of flour used for each loaf was 4 quarts. This is the same amount of wilderness manna each man was to have gathered on the sixth day of the week (Exodus 16:22). Given that the loaves were prepared on the sixth day and placed on the table on the Sabbath, and given that the frankincense was placed on the bread as a memorial, it becomes immediately clear that the bread and the frankincense memorialised the manna.

Why frankincense? This aromatic is one of the world's most precious, not only a fitting gift for the Christ-child, but a most appropriate symbol of the purity of the Son of God. The showbread was to be broken, not burned, but the frankincense was burned in its place as an offering that foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

The memorial remains for us today. When The Bread of Life gathered the Twelve at the Last Supper, He instituted a ritual that was to be a memorial to His saving work. As He broke the bread and offered it to them, He said, "*This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19).

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[18] There are various explanations as to how the loaves and frankincense were arranged. I like the depiction given in the following website: http://www.templeinstitute.org/bezichin.htm. Note that one pile is not removed until the new pile is in place so that there is never a time when bread is not on the table. Notice also the size of the loaves – 4 quarts (4.4 litres) is a lot of flour.

April 19 **The Jubilee (EG)**

Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan…do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. Leviticus 25:10-11.

Of all the gifts God gave His people, the law of the jubilee must be the greatest – that is apart from the Messiah Himself. Every fiftieth year, on the Day of Atonement, a trumpet was to sound throughout the land declaring the return of all land to its original family. Not only that, but that year all Hebrew bondservants were to be set free and the land was to remain unharvested for the poor to eat from.

Jubilee, therefore, signifies restoration - restoration of land to its original family, restoration of freedom to the servant, restoration of dignity and status to those who have lost them. Jubilee provides the opportunity to start again unshackled by the chains of injustice, oppression and poverty. What wisdom is seen in the jubilee. We cannot help but wonder what effect such a system, carefully implemented, would have if applied to the poor and dispossessed of the world today.

Why was the jubilee announced on the Day of Atonement? Because on that day God and man are reconciled, they are restored to their Creation relationship. On that day, sin is removed from the camp, and all who have been shackled by its chains are set free.

When our first parents disobeyed God, Satan claimed ownership of the planet for himself. But his claim is short lived; for the great Jubilee of all jubilees is soon to come. On that day the trumpet shall sound and the Lord shall descend in power and great glory to restore the world to those to whom it rightfully belongs. On that day sin will be eradicated once and for all time and the land will be at rest. Long live that day!

April 20 The Kinsman-Redeemer (G)

If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him. Lev.25:47-48.

Have you ever felt resentful when you see wealthy foreigners come into your homeland and start opening businesses and buying up the land? To make matters worse, they employ you for a pittance and treat you as though the land is theirs.

If so, your indignation is justified. God too sees the injustice in it, and made provision in Israel to protect against it. He established a law that allowed a poor servant and his family to be redeemed by a kinsman, the price depending upon the number of years remaining until the next jubilee. Thus a foreigner living in Israel would have been aware that his servants were not his to keep.

Of course, this law assumed a willingness by the foreigner to abide by the law of the land. That is certainly not the case where the foreigner is an invader. In that case God had promised His people that if they would, "*follow my decrees and…obey my commands…You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you"* (Leviticus 26:3-8). In other words, if the people were faithful to God, they would never be invaded, but would be held in high esteem by all other nations.

Yet there was a time when, through disobedience, God's people were invaded by an alien; it happened in Eden when Satan claimed the world as his. We sold ourselves to him and he became our cruel taskmaster. Yet, praise God, we have a relative, Jesus the Messiah, and he has paid the price for our redemption and released us from the devil's bondage. He is our Kinsman-Redeemer.

…If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink…Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD. Numbers 6:1-8.

The Nazirite vow was taken by individuals who wished to set themselves apart in order to be fully consecrated to God. The word literally means *separation*. The vow was usually taken for a set period of time, but could be for life as in the case of Samson and John the Baptist. During the period of the vow, nothing related to the grape was to be consumed; the hair was not to be cut, and a dead body not to be touched.

Was Jesus a Nazirite? During the years of His ministry it would appear not; for apart from touching the dead (Matthew 9:25), His ministry was only a few days old (John 2:1) when he turned water into wine. At that time His only disciples were those who had been with John the Baptist, and possibly had been Nazirites themselves

John was the forerunner of the Messiah at the time of His first advent. Now we live in the days prior to His second advent, how much more should there be a forerunner today, a movement consecrated to prepare the way of the Lord? If so, should they take the Nazirite vow? If yes, should it be in a literal or figurative sense? What kind of lives should they live?

At the Last Supper, after offering the cup to His disciples, Jesus said to them, "*I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom"* (Matthew 26:29). By these words Jesus was also taking the Nazirite vow, for there was to be a time of separation between Him and His people. But the time will come when we will again sit together at His table (Revelation 19:7-9), and then separation shall be no more.

The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you...and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone. Numbers 11:16-17.

In the appointment of seventy administrators we see the development of a national government in Israel. Jesus used the same structure when He established the Church, for just as Israel had one overall leader, Moses, who led the twelve tribes, so Jesus appointed twelve disciples who were to become the foundation of Church government under His leadership. Then, as Moses appointed seventy elders upon whom God's Spirit would rest, so we read in Luke 10:1 that Jesus also appointed seventy men who were to act in His name and power so that, as they later reported to Jesus, "*even the demons submit to us through your name"* (v. 17).

Luke records in his gospel that Jesus was emotionally affected by the Seventy's animated report, and upon hearing their eager testimonies, exclaimed, "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"* (Luke 10:18). Luke then records that Jesus rejoiced in His heart and said to His disciples, "*Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it"* (Luke 10:21-24).

Obviously an event of great significance was taking place with the work of the Seventy; Jesus was establishing His kingdom, the structure of which is for eternity. We too are a part of that structure, for we are to be "*unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth"* (Revelation 5:10 KJV).

April 23 **Aaron's Rod (EH)**

The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. Number 17:8.

This is not the first time we have run into Aaron's rod; it is the same rod that became a living snake, turned the Nile to blood and brought water from a rock. There is something special about this rod, for it has now budded and produced almonds. Was it a magic rod? Certainly not! Did it have life inherent with it? No, the life it displayed was not from itself, but from God, for even what is lifeless will respond to the call of God. Rejoice you saints, for the day is soon approaching when all who sleep in the dust will hear the call of the Master.

The record tells us that Aaron's rod was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant along with the tables of the Ten Commandments and the golden pot of Manna. Why was this rod so special as to deserve a place in the Ark? The rod is regarded in the Bible as a symbol of authority and justice. The same rod used by the gentle shepherd to guide the lowly sheep was also used to administer awesome justice to the wolf.

When Aaron's rod was cast down before Pharaoh, the haughty king was to understand through the evidence of the rod that Moses truly spoke with divine authority. Now for the Israelites, the almond-producing rod was conclusive evidence that Moses was acting fully upon God's authority.

Aaron's rod was a living Rod, the symbol of Him who is our eternal Ruler, Guide and Protector. All three items in the Ark were types of Christ, The Commandments a transcript of His perfect character; the Manna a symbol of Christ our Great Provider, and now the Rod as the evidence of His divine Authority.

April 24 **The Red Heifer (EG)**

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: "This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Numbers 19:1-3.

Just as today we still get it wrong and need to come onto our knees before our Saviour, so the devout Israelite could not totally avoid becoming ceremonially impure. There are always times when the clean need to come into contact with the unclean, for the dead must be buried.

But then death is a type of sin because if it were not for sin there would be no death. Therefore God gave instructions for a unique ceremony to deal with ritual impurity; a type of sin offering that required the sacrifice of a heifer, not just any heifer, but a red one, without blemish or defect, which had never worn a yoke. It was to be sacrificed outside the camp in the presence of a leading priest who was then to take its blood in his hands and sprinkle it seven times towards the camp of the people (or later, Jerusalem). Then the entire carcass, including its blood, was to be burnt up. The ashes were kept to be mixed with water in later purification ceremonies.

Jesus is clearly seen in this sacrifice. Why red? Because Christ's blood was to be shed for sin. Why no defect? Because Christ was sinless. Why no yoke? Because Christ was under no obligation. Why outside the camp? Because Christ was to suffer outside the city walls. Why all of it burnt up? Because Christ's sacrifice was complete. Why a heifer and not a bullock? That's not so well understood. Possibly it was to avoid confusion with the Egyptian sacrifice of a red bull; possibly because the female is the life-bearer, and lifeblood is red.

Yes, we still get it wrong; no matter how little we want to, we still come short of perfection and will continue to do so until Christ returns. Therefore God has given us our own Red Heifer, Jesus Christ, who atones not just for our sins, but for all our shortcomings.

April 25 **The Man who is Clean (EG)**

A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin. Numbers 19:9.

While the heifer was burning, the priest was to take three items: cedar wood, scarlet thread and hyssop, and throw them into the pyre. When all was burned up the ashes were, in fact, a compound of the four.

As a result of handling the blood, the priest was now unclean for he had touched a carcass. Therefore, 'a man who is clean' was to take up the ashes and place them in a special container for use when someone requested cleansing of ceremonial impurity. When occasion demanded, some of the ash compound would be mixed with pure water known as the *water of cleansing* and, using a sprig of hyssop, the priest would sprinkle the mixture on the family tent, thus purifying it. This ceremony was performed for non-Israelites as well as Israelites, and was not a once only ceremony, but was repeated as often as necessary.

In this ceremony Christ is also foreshadowed, not only in the seven-fold sprinkling of the blood of the heifer, but also in the sprinkling of the ashes. For Christ is also the Man who is clean, who ministers in the Sanctuary on our behalf, so that whenever a sinner comes to him for cleansing, whether Jew or Gentile, he is purified.

There is no limit to the times we can come to the Man who is Clean. Even though we fall time after time He will never turn us away. No matter how deep our defilement, He will always cleanse us. King David referred to this when, after his great crime he wrote, "*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow"* (Psalm 51:7).

April 26 The Rod, the Rock and the Water (EG)

…Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." Numbers 20:7-12.

At first reading it seems difficult to figure out what Moses did wrong to incur such divine displeasure. God told him to take a rod, possibly Aaron's rod from the Sanctuary, and instead of striking the rock with it he was only to speak to the rock. Moses had once before struck a rock with Aaron's rod and water had flowed, but that time he was instructed to do so. Obviously this time the rod's presence alone was sufficient authority to provide the life-giving water.

So what was wrong with Moses' actions? Well, we have seen from previous readings that all three elements involved in this incident foreshadow the coming Messiah. Christ, the living Rod, Christ the Rock, and Christ the Water of Life. Therefore when Moses said, *"Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"*(v.10), He took upon himself the authority of Christ Himself, as though *he* had the power to produce water. Not only that, but Christ was to die but once for sin, and thus the Rock was to be struck only once, for "*we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Hebrews 10:10). By presumptuously striking it again, Moses demonstrated lack of faith and lack of understanding of God's promises.

There is a lesson for us in this: not only is our God merciful and tender, He is also holy and all powerful, and we should never take Him for granted; we need to understand the difference between faith and presumption. After all, as C.S. Lewis put it, 'He is not a tame lion'[19]. Without Him we can do nothing, but in Him we can perform miracles.

[19] C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.*

…The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." Numbers 21:4-7.

This event must be one of the most theologically instructional in ancient Israel's history. In this incident the gospel of salvation is revealed in such a profound and subtle way, that many readers of the Bible fail to see it. To understand this passage is to go a layer deeper in comprehension of the plan of salvation.

Most people, even those not Christian, are familiar with John 3:16, the most quoted passage in the New Testament. Yet how many know that the context for that famous remark was our reading for today, for Jesus said to Nicodemus, "*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life"* (John 3:14-15).

So what was really going on here? We need to understand this story because it reveals astounding insights into heaven's work on our behalf. For example, why a snake? How could a predator that has killed so many be a source of healing? Why did Jesus give this illustration to Nicodemus? Was He likening Himself to a snake? Is it not Satan the snake represents?

Yes, this is a strange passage and its theology is deep. Yet we should search into it because Heaven wants us to understand the deep things of God; they are true wisdom (Hebrews 5:12-14). Many see the Bible as myth and fable, but the depth of passages such as this one are the reason the angel said to Daniel, "*None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand"* (Daniel 12:10).

The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. Numbers 21:8-9.

No doubt Nicodemus would have thought of this incident as he stood at the foot of the cross gazing up at Him who was lifted up. It seems strange that God should have told Moses to make an image of the snake. How could a snake represent Jesus? When we think of snakes we think of that old serpent the devil. How can we draw a likeness between the accuser and the Saviour? Isn't that blasphemy? The answer is that the snake represents Sin. Paul understood this and wrote in 2Corinthians 5:21, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.…"* It was Sin that was hung on the Cross of Calvary.

Jesus came not only to forgive our sins, but also to deal with the whole problem of sin. When He took our sins upon Himself we were forgiven, but legally to fulfil the law of sin and death more was required. In order to remove sin from the universe He had to take upon Himself the sin of the universe. This is a profound idea, and difficult to accept. Nevertheless, it helps us understand what a terrible thing sin is. We should never treat it lightly, nor seek to excuse our peccadilloes, for by so doing we make light of this infinite sacrifice. Jesus did not just take our sin upon Him; He became Sin. He did not just take the curse upon Himself, he became a Curse (Galatians 3:13).

Now we can more fully grasp the completeness of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, for there He died the ultimate and eternal penalty for Sin, what Revelation 20:14 calls *the second death* - the ultimate removal of the sinner from the presence of a holy God. That is what the Cross is all about; that is why His despair when He cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* He was crushed by the sins of the world.

April 29 **A Star out of Jacob (DE)**

…A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Numbers 24:17.

Given the context of this passage, we might be forgiven for applying it to David, son of Jesse, and we would be correct. Yet a greater Star than David was to arise out of Jacob; One who would crush for all time the skulls of God's enemies.

These sublime words were uttered by Balaam, the greedy prophet who sought in vain to curse the Israelites for a fistful of money. Balaam was not an Israelite, but probably from among those who, like Laban, lived in the Euphrates basin, but were believers in God.

Balaam had developed a reputation far and wide as a prophet and miracle-worker so that even the Moabites knew of him. However, his fame had corrupted him so that he now used his connection with God for monetary gain. In this Balaam was a type of Judas Iscariot who also hoped by his connection with Christ to become rich and powerful in the kingdom of God. Just as Balaam betrayed his God for silver, so did Judas.

When Balaam found that he was unable to curse the Israelites as Balak wished, and so was to lose his reward, he advised the Moabite king that if he wanted to destroy Israel he would have to do it by subtlety; he told him to mingle with Israel in trade and marriage, and thus introduce idolatry among them. This, Balaam said, will devastate them as surely as the curse.

Balaam's sublime words of today's reading came from a mouth that wanted only to utter a curse. Likewise Judas was the most articulate and savvy of the disciples yet was full of corruption. This teaches us an important lesson; truth is discerned, not in the giftedness of the messenger, but in the message itself.

…When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. Numbers 35:9-11.

Imagine you have accidentally killed someone and the aggrieved family are after your blood. They believe they have the right to kill you and have appointed the deceased's eldest male relative to do the job. How will you escape the avenger?

God, in His wisdom, has allocated six of the forty-eight levitical towns as cities of refuge. They are located so that wherever you are in Israel you can reach one within a day if you waste no time getting there. Once there the avenger cannot touch you without himself becoming a murderer. You apply to a council of elders to hear your case. It comes to trial and you are declared innocent of murder. Then what? Are you free to return home? No, because the blood you shed has defiled the land and can only be atoned for by your removal from the land (verses 32- 33). You must abide in the city until the death of the high priest. Then custom, culture and law demand the matter be put to rest.

The Psalmist no doubt was thinking of these cities when he wrote, "*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble"* (Psalm 46:1). Likewise the Apostle Paul wrote in a letter, "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1).

Jesus is our City of Refuge; we have sinned and must flee to him without delay. He acquits us on the merits of His own blood, but bids us abide in Him, for only in Him are we safe from the avenger (1Peter 5:8).

May 1 **The Ransom (E)**

The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send him back to the city of refuge to which he fled. He must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil. Numbers 35:25.

In God's mind it is a serious thing to take a human life; even accidental death is taken very seriously in heaven. Those who think they do God a service by putting to death those they judge as heretic or infidel understand nothing of how offensive to God is the killing of a human.

Today's reading concerns those who were found guilty of taking a life without malicious intent or through misfortune. There was no animal sacrifice that could be offered to atone for killing someone, even accidentally (v.31-33). The only way manslaughter could be atoned for was by the death of the high priest (from natural causes). In this way the high priest was a type of substitute for the guilty person. There is wisdom in this because it gave the aggrieved families time to accept and forgive. If the killer were to leave the city of refuge before the high priest died, he would certainly be putting himself at risk.

Imagine what might take place when it was announced that the high priest had died. Depending upon how long the priest had lived, there may be some kind of exodus from the six cities of refuge as people returned to their homes. They were to have no fear of retribution for they were ransomed by the death of the high priest, and were no longer considered guilty.

Not only did Jesus die for us as the victim, the Passover Lamb, not only is He the great City of Refuge to whom we can flee, but He died for us as the great High Priest who has ransomed all those who had taken refuge in Him. Through His death we are accounted righteous and free to go. But then why would we want to leave such a City of Refuge?

May 2 **Denied Entry (EH)**

The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he solemnly swore that I would not cross the Jordan and enter the good land the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance. I will die in this land; I will not cross the Jordan… Deuteronomy 4:21-22.

As we approach the end of the Torah, or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, we find ourselves looking more and more to the Israelites' imminent entry into the promised land. Moses, who has led the nation for 40 years is soon to die, and has been denied entry due to his sin of striking the rock.

Just as Moses experienced God's anger, so Jesus, when He took our sins on the cross, experienced the wrath of God. Just as Moses knew He could not enter the good land, so Jesus knew, as He hung on the cross, that His existence was coming to an end. But, you say, Jesus knew He would be raised from the dead, He had even said He would be. That is true, but on *that* day, the sins of the world crushing His soul (Matthew 26:38), the darkness and evil around Him (Matthew 27:45), the withdrawal of the Father's presence (Matthew 27:46), He was unable to see through the tomb. The death we die at the end of our seventy years is described as a sleep until the resurrection (John 11:11-24). But the ultimate death of the unsaved on Judgment Day is the second death – eternal separation from God. That is the death Jesus experienced that day on Calvary. In becoming Sin He experienced God's hatred of sin and paid its full price.

Praise God that is not the end of the story, for Moses did not remain in his grave on Mount Nebo, but, despite Satan's objections, was raised from his sleep (Jude 9), and was later to appear before Jesus, along with Elijah, to encourage Him (Luke 9:28-31). In this, Moses again prefigured Christ, whose body Satan also tried to hold in the tomb, but could not. Praise God the grave is not the end of the story.

May 3 **Our Sabbath Rest (EG)**

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:15.

This reading comes from the Deuteronomy version of the Ten Commandments. The Exodus version, which was written by God on stone, tells us to remember the Sabbath because it memorialises the Creation. This version is Moses' expansion of the commandment giving the people another reason to remember the Sabbath. Rather than contradicting God, Moses is introducing another aspect to the Law which we are prone to overlook: the Law is also about Grace. We are now told to remember the Sabbath because it signifies Redemption from slavery as well as Creation.

We are mistaken when we try to divorce Law and Grace. The Sermon on the Mount is all about the Gospel, but at the same time it magnifies the Law. Seven times in Matthew 5 Jesus quotes the law and then expands upon it in terms of Grace. "*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* is one of the seven. The Gospel does not replace the Law; it magnifies it.

In today's reading Moses links the Sabbath with Redemption giving us a second reason to memorialise it. The two great events of Biblical history are the Creation and the Redemption, Eden and Golgotha, the Tree of Life and the Cross. On the seventh day of Creation God rested from His work and set aside the day as holy because of it. On the Redemption Sabbath Christ again rested from all the work He had done, this time in a tomb. And God saw all that Jesus had done, and behold it was very good.

May 4 **The Lord is One (BC)**

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Deuteronomy 6:4.

These words, the *Shema*, are probably the most repeated in the Hebrew Scriptures. It surely is not by chance that God placed them beside the words that Christ identified as the foundation of the *Torah*, verse 5: *"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength".* Yet there are those who abuse the majesty of these sacred words by using them as a polemic against the divine nature of the Messiah. If God is One, they say, how can He be three-in-one? But is that the reason this magnificent declaration is given us? They forget that the word *One* is compound and is used to signify unity of purpose rather than singularity of number, as in, *"the congregation was gathered together as* one *man"* (Judges 20:1). The same word is used in Genesis 2:24, "*a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become* one *flesh";* two people – one flesh. What a profound concept; does it not have something to say about the nature of God, since man was made in God's image?

Of the many claims Jesus made about His Messiahship, there was one that enraged the people above all others. It occurred during a dispute with the religious leaders after He said *"I and the Father are one".* When they heard this they picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy, *"because",* they said, "*you, a mere man, claim to be God"* (John 10:22-39).

They failed to understand the full meaning of the *Shema,* but it went even deeper than that: Jesus prayed for those who would come to believe in Him that they also *"may be* one *in Us: that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be* one*, just as We are* one*: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one…*(John 17:20-23 NKJV).

May 5 **In the Wilderness 1 (F)**

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. Deuteronomy 8:2.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus did for forty days in the wilderness? Satan presumably did not pick a fight with Him until He was at his weakest and most vulnerable – right at the end of the days. So was Jesus just waiting to be weak enough to be tempted? The experience of the Israelites during their forty-year wilderness sojourn gives insight into this question.

We have seen how the history of the Israelites anticipates the life of the Messiah, thus the forty years in the desert foreshadowed the forty days of Jesus' wilderness experience. As it was a testing time for Jesus, so it was a testing time for the Israelites, for God planned these years to mould and train them; to turn them from a subjugated community into a noble and holy nation. They had many a bitter experience during those years, but through it all they learned the ways of God and His will for their lives as individuals and as a nation. They were being readied to become citizens of the Promised Land.

This gives us a clue as to the experience of Christ during His forty-day sojourn. We have no idea where He went, nor how far He wandered. Perhaps He spent much of the time in Mt. Sinai as did Moses all those years before. Wherever He was, He was in the presence of God, communing with Him and receiving the instruction He would need to fulfil His mission.

We also have our wilderness experiences. Satan tempts and annoys us at our lowest moments, but in it all God has a purpose. As with the Israelites, God is moulding us into a holy people who understand that *"man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* (verse 3). He is preparing us for the Promised Land.

May 6 **The Good Land (EFH)**

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing… Deuteronomy 8:7-9.

It is deeply ingrained in mankind to look to a day when we will live without pain and grief, without the enemies of death and the grave. Whether it be Nirvana, the 'happy hunting ground', or the new heavens and new earth of our Bible, we all long for a Promised Land.

The good news is that God also wants that, and has prepared exactly that for us. In fact it has always been God's plan that our existence on earth should resemble as closely as possible life in heaven. Only our stubborn resistance to the things of God has prevented it. The land referred to in our passage today is an earthly land; but even in that land the people, if faithful, were to be so greatly blessed that visitors and travellers would stand in amazement and awe of this godly nation (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and Isaiah 65:17-25).

The imagery presented by today's reading is very much pastoral, bringing to mind a shepherd leading his flock into well watered pastures. Not just leading them into a good land, but dwelling among them there as their guardian, provider and friend. That land was Canaan in Palestine.

John the Revelator also saw a good land, a heavenly one this time - "...*a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away"* (Revelation 21:1). This good land is not the earthly Canaan, but the heavenly Canaan, and it will have streams of living water. The Good Shepherd will lead His flock to it, and He will dwell among them forever as their Guardian, Provider and Friend.

When I went up on the mountain…I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water. The LORD gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the LORD proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. Deuteronomy 9:9-10.

A few days ago we asked what Jesus did for forty days alone in the desert. Today's passage gives us further insight as to the answer to that question. When Moses went onto Mt. Sinai he fasted for forty days in the presence of God receiving the instructions he needed for the founding of a new nation under God. When he came out of the mountain he carried in his hands the blueprint for the establishment of the nation, the Ten Commandments, along with all the instructions that would govern the life and worship of the people. He brought with him the Law of God.

Moses would not have spent these privileged days thinking about his growling stomach. He was in the presence of God, and that was sustenance enough. Similarly, Jesus in the wilderness was not just performing an exercise in how long man can go without food, He was in the presence of God receiving the blueprint for the founding of a new nation, a heavenly realm that would last for eternity. It was not until the end of the forty days, when He left God's immediate presence, that He became aware of His physical need. It was then that Satan gained access to Him.

Moses descended the mountain bearing a blueprint. So Jesus also came out of the wilderness with a blueprint, one that contained the Law that would govern His realm. Yet it was more than Law; it was an amplification of the Law; *You have heard that it was said…but I tell you…*were the words of His first sermon (Matthew 5-7). It was something else too; it was Law mingled with Grace. It was the Gospel.

Do not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep that has any defect or flaw in it, for that would be detestable to him. Deuteronomy 17:1

We have already seen that the sacrifice must be without defect, but this passage gives us the opportunity to explore more fully why. We are told here that a defect would be detestable, or an abomination (KJV), to God. Why? The Apostle Peter puts it like this: "…*it was not with perishable things…that you were redeemed…but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect"* (1Peter 1:18-19). In other words, although Christ was "*tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He was without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15).

'Detestable' is a strong word, and it is the word God uses to describe sin. Why does God hate sin so much? Because He is Light; He is Truth; He is Love, He is holy. Sin is all that these are not. It is because of sin that the Son of God, the Holy One of Israel, was tortured and crucified, and it is we who have committed the sin. God hates sin because it cost heaven the life of the Commander of heaven.

The prophet Malachi complains about defective offerings and says to the people, "*Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?"* (Malachi 1:8). Likewise King David, when Araunah made a gift of his threshing floor as a site for the future temple of Jerusalem, said, "*I will not…sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing"* (1Chronicles 21:24).

We do not offer blood sacrifices today, but we still make offerings. Might these also be detestable to God? Jesus told the parable of two men who went to pray. One boasted of his good works and pious life, but his offering was rejected. The other could not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "*God, have mercy on me, a sinner"* (Luke 18:10-14). Now there is an offering without defect.

May 9 **Trust and Obey (DEH)**

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. Deuteronomy 18:15.

We will cover a parallel passage tomorrow, and confirm the identity of this prophet as Jesus of Nazareth. It is the second sentence I wish to consider today: *You must listen to him.* When someone says to you, "Do what so-and-so tells you to do", you have to trust both the one who gives that instruction, and the one you are told to obey. Therefore there is a deep trust relationship inherent in these words.

There are two other times in the Bible where these words are used. The first is found in Genesis 41:55: "*When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph and do what he tells you' ".* How would the people have felt if they knew Joseph was dishonest? But Joseph was not such a man, he was chosen of God to prefigure Him who would say "*I am the bread of life: he that comes to me will never go hungry"* (John 6:35).

The second is found in John 2:5: "[Jesus'] *mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'".* These words were spoken by Mary to the waiters at a wedding, and again trust is the key. Why should the servants take instruction from a guest unless she was someone whose authority they respected? What was this unspoken bond between mother and son that Mary could leave the wine shortage in His hands to deal with?

You must listen to him. This admonition still stands today. The Prophet is no longer among us, but His Word and His Spirit are. His Word, the Bible, is a lamp to light up our path. His Spirit is a Guide for our conscience so that we know right from wrong. We must listen to Him

May 10 A Prophet Like Moses (DEH)

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. Deuteronomy 18:18.

God is talking to Moses, which begs the question, Which prophet was like Moses? Was it Elijah? He is the one often associated with Moses; they are seen together with Jesus at the Transfiguration, and there is evidence to suggest that they are the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

The people of Israel understood this promise to refer to the Messiah, for after Jesus had fed the five thousand they said concerning Him, "*Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world"* (John 6:14). Jesus also referred to Himself as a prophet (see Mark 6:4) Therefore there is no doubt that Jesus saw Himself as the Prophet referred to in this passage as did the believing Jews.

There are three functions of ministry to which men were anointed; the prophet, the priest and the king. The prophet was anointed to be a spokesman (or woman) for God before the people. The priest was anointed as spokesman for the people before God. The king was anointed as ruler of the affairs of the nation.

Only a few have ever been more than one of these. Melchizedek was both priest and king (see Genesis 14:18-20), and Samuel was both prophet and priest. Samuel was never anointed as king, but did rule as a judge over Israel. The only One ever anointed to all three is Messiah; as Prophet (Isaiah 61:1, 2), as Priest (Psalm 110:1-4), and as King (Psalm 2:7-8). Jesus the Prophet came to us to reveal the Father, Jesus the High Priest came to be our Mediator before the Father, and Jesus our King will reign over us in righteousness for all eternity. Indeed we are three times blessed.

May 11 A Prophet Like Moses 2 (DEH)

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. Deuteronomy 18:18.

We can't let Moses go so quickly; it was not just as prophet that he was a Christ-type. Consider these parallels between the lives and deaths of Moses and Jesus:

- Both were of humble births but became heirs to a kingdom
- Both were condemned to death as infants by despotic kings
- Both were preserved from death even though thousands of other children their age were not spared
- Both were called out of Egypt
- Both gave up the luxury of great kingdoms to serve their people
- Both earned their keep in a humble occupation
- One instituted the Passover; the other fulfilled the Passover
- Both fasted for 40 days while in the presence of God
- Both wandered the wilderness, Moses for 40 years, Christ for forty days
- Both miraculously fed the people
- Both brought deliverance to their people
- Both were founders of a new nation
- Both provided 'living' water
- Both were despised by influential and powerful members of their societies
- Both died as a result of the sins of men.

There are more, but this is enough. Except for this: we see that both died as a result of sin, but was only one raised from death? Jude 9 records that Michael contended with Satan over the body of Moses who was later to join Elijah in conversation with Jesus at the Transfiguration. There we have it; not just their lives and their deaths, but their resurrection as well. Both were raised from death, and because they were so can we be.

If a man guilty of a capital offence is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse… Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

The Apostle Paul refers to this passage in Galatians 3:13 where he writes, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'".* Paul places this passage in the context of the law by saying that those who do not obey the law are under a curse. Deuteronomy 28 is the famous *blessing and cursing* chapter that motivated the people to try to avoid God's curse for disobedience. Hence the pharisaic traditions and attendant legalism that had developed by Christ's day; they tried to make the law itself their saviour.

Yet this mechanical obedience to the law did not free the legalist from the curse. Righteousness comes only through faith in Him who alone has the power to redeem us from the curse of the law and bring us back into harmony with heaven. But by what means did the Messiah free us from the curse? He who was the Author of the law voluntarily placed Himself under subjection to the law, and hence under the curse of the law and subject to its penalty. Even though free of sin He allowed Himself to be counted a transgressor and took upon Himself the guilt of the world. "*The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all... He was numbered with the transgressors, and bore the sin of many"* (Isaiah 53:6, 12). The Messiah became the curse and was hung up between heaven and earth, in the sight of God and man, for all to see.

Yet, it was not lawful for such a body to be left overnight. Therefore God chose a faithful man to take Him down that day and place Him in the tomb in accordance with the law. Even in death Jesus fulfilled the law.

May 13 **Joshua (EH)**

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. Deuteronomy 34:9.

This passage brings us to the end of Deuteronomy and to the end of the Torah. Now the baton is passed into the hand of Joshua the general who will stand at the head of the armies of Israel as they occupy the land of their inheritance.

Like Moses before him, Joshua is also a Christ figure, this time foreshadowing Christ the mighty warrior who is called Faithful and True, and who in righteousness judges and makes war (Revelation 19:11). For as General Joshua was to lead the people into the land of Canaan, so Jesus (the Greek form of the name Joshua) will lead His people into the heavenly Canaan.

Our text for today tells us that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom. Isaiah foretells One to come will also similarly be filled (Isaiah 11:1-2), and Luke records the fulfilment of this prophecy by saying of Jesus, "*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him"* (Luke 2:40 KJV).

God does not restrict the spirit of wisdom to only the greats of the Bible, but to all who seek it for God's glory. For the Apostle Paul wrote, "*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better"* (Ephesians 1:17). This wisdom is not given us so that people will admire our acumen, but so that we might know God better. True wisdom is not mere knowledge, and is more than simply making right decisions; it is an insightful understanding in spiritual matters that comes only through the grace of God and study of His Word. May God grant us that wisdom.

May 14 **The Scarlet Cord (E)**

*The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down…*Joshua 2:17-18.

To suggest typology of Christ in this passage may be seen by some to be stretching it a bit. After all there is no New Testament reference to the scarlet cord, and the only mention of Rahab is as a harlot, albeit one of great faith.

Yet it is hard to pass by this story without making reference to it. You see, Rahab is listed by Matthew (1:5) in the lineage of Jesus. But we ask, how could such a woman be an ancestor of the Messiah? Not only a prostitute, but a Gentile, a pagan, and a serious liar to boot. Are these the kind of people we want as Jesus' ancestors? Not only Rahab, but Tamar and Ruth also have very questionable pedigrees. Manasseh is there too, the most evil of all the kings of Judah.

We would prefer such names were not in Jesus' family tree, but if they weren't, what hope would there be for those of us who are Rahabs, Ruths, and Manassehs? When Jesus took humanity, He took the dregs of humanity. Remember Jacob's ladder. It reached all the way into heaven and all the way onto the earth, making a way for all of us to have access to heaven. It was not the good guys Jesus came to save but the underbelly of society.

Yet all these names have something in common, like Rahab, they all threw out a scarlet cord, scarlet Maybe because of their own sinfulness. Yet we are told, "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow"* (Isaiah 1:18). Theologians tell us that the Hebrew word for 'cord' in today's text is actually linen, maybe a scarlet sheet, or scarlet robe. Maybe it was like the one they put on Jesus at His crucifixion - when He took on the sins of the world.

May 15 The Captain of the Lord's Host (A)

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Joshua 5:13-15.

What a burden of responsibility Joshua must have felt as he led the people into this new land. Moses was now dead, and would no longer advise him. Canaan was occupied by a powerful people who knew every inch and cranny of their land, and were familiar with all its resources. The Israelites, on the other hand, were untrained in war and were unfamiliar with the land. Only by God's intervention could they hope to possess this territory.

Joshua knew that there were formidable warriors in Canaan, so when confronted with such a man while he was alone in prayer, he was instantly in fighting mode. But the response to his demand, *"Are you for us or for our enemies?"* left him in no doubt that the Man who confronted him was the same One who had stayed Abraham's knife-wielding hand, had wrestled with Jacob, and had spoken to Moses at the burning bush. He who had been in the fire and in the pillar was now speaking to Joshua.

Christ revealed Himself to Joshua alone, and not to the people at large. Their belief was to be based, not on direct revelation, but on God's promises to them, and in their promise to Joshua to follow him just as they had Moses. As with the Israelites of old, Christ seldom reveals Himself to us in great signs and wonders. Instead, we are told, *"the just shall live by his faith"* (Habakkuk 2:4). That kind of faith comes, not by seeing burning bushes, but by belief in the promises of the Word of God. Armed with such faith we can move forward in complete assurance that the walls that confront us today will also come tumbling down.

May 16 **The Sound of Silence (EH)**

*Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse...*Joshua 6:4-5.

There is a passage in the Book of Revelation which, in its own context, is difficult to understand. Yet the passage, Revelation 8:1-6, has some remarkable parallels with today's reading, which may just shed light on it and help us to see another aspect of the ministry of Christ our High Priest. Let's have a look at some of these parallels.

Firstly, the two passages each refer to seven trumpets. Trumpets signify judgment, and were blown on the Day of Atonement. They were also blown on the seventh day of the march around Jericho, and with their sounding that godless city received its payback for centuries of corruption. Similarly in Revelation 8, when the seven trumpets sound, judgments fall upon a corrupt world.

Secondly, there is a period of silence followed by great devastation. The Israelites marched around Jericho in silence for seven days, which is half an hour in prophetic time, the time given in Revelation 8.[20]

Thirdly, both passages involve a transition from intercession to judgment. Moses had served as mediator between God and the people. But now they are under Joshua, the warrior leader who brings judgment upon a land whose cup of iniquity is now full. Similarly in Revelation 8 the Angel, who is none other than Christ our Mediator, casts His golden censor to the earth, bringing intercession to an end and judgment to a world whose cup of iniquity is also full to the brim.

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[20] The year-day principle is a study on its own. Prophetic times are often given in days, but are fulfilled in years. For example, the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 is not 490 days, but 490 years.

That same night the [Angel of] the *LORD said to* [Gideon] … *Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God…* Judges 6:25-26.

That the Angel of the Lord is Christ is not a new idea, for we have now heard Him speak to many others before Gideon. Nevertheless His dealings with Gideon teach principles in the way Jesus deals with us today. For God never changes, and the principles that govern the Kingdom of Heaven are the same for all, regardless of the generation to which we belong.

The Angel of the Lord is to take Gideon on a long journey that will test his faith to the limit. But before the journey can commence there is some basic housekeeping to be done: Israel has backslidden, and there is idolatry in the land, which must be dealt with before God will condescend to lead Israel. Thus Gideon is to declare war on his peoples' idolatry before declaring war on his enemies.

Does our Lord expect less from us? Shall we 'put on the whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6) and march out in the name of Christ while our idols – whatever they may be – are still in place? God forbid. Let me declare war on the idols in my own life before taking on the sins of my neighbour. Put in New Testament parlance; let me remove the timber from my own eye that I may see clearly to remove the splinter from my neighbour's eye.

Gideon was faithful in his demolition of Israel's idols, and in response God bore patiently his immature faith in the matter of the fleece. Christ's tender nurture of Gideon led this timid farmer to become a mighty warrior for God who, with just three hundred men, was to defeat an army too large to count. As He did with Gideon, so the Angel of the Lord is ready to nurture each one of us and to turn our timidity into holy valour.

May 18 **The Teacher of the Lord (A)**

The angel of the LORD answered [Manoah] *"Your wife must do all that I have told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean..."*Judges 13:13-14.

There is a pattern emerging in the Angel's dealing with men; in nearly all his visits He first provides some practical instruction in daily living, an instruction that is in fact a kingdom principle. Just as Jesus, when on earth, was a great Teacher, so in His pre-incarnate form He is by nature the Great Teacher.

To Hagar He said, Return and submit yourself to your mistress, teaching respect for authority. To Moses He said, Take off your shoes, teaching reverence for what is holy. Balaam He rebuked for cruelty to an animal, thus teaching us the importance of caring for the creatures under our dominion. To Gideon He taught heaven's abhorrence of idolatry. By Manoah's day the Israelites had so far departed from God's ideal that He needed to remind them of the basic distinction between clean and unclean.

These principles are not revealed just to make our lives harder; they are what heaven is all about. In heaven there will be holiness and kindness, there will be nothing unclean, and no idols. For that reason Jesus, during His earthly ministry, healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, cleansed the lepers, and more. He did these things not just for mercy's sake, but because in the heavenly kingdom these aberrations will not exist.

Were the Angel of the Lord to come and talk with us today, He would undoubtedly open His dialogue with some simple instruction to help us in life's journey. No doubt the instruction would be the same as before, for the principles of God's kingdom never change.

When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." Ruth 3:7-9.

We looked at the subject of the kinsman–redeemer back in Leviticus 25:47-48. In that context we saw how someone sold into bondage could be redeemed by a relative and thus given a fresh start in life. In today's passage we find land once sold (in this case by Naomi's husband when they went to Moab) may also be redeemed by a relative. Yet there is a catch here for the redeemer; if the deceased owner of the land (Ruth's late husband) has left a childless widow, in buying the land the redeemer must also redeem the widow and make her his wife. But that is not all; any children born to this relationship would take the name of the widow's deceased husband, not that of the new husband. Furthermore the land would be inherited by the children of that relationship, not by the kinsman-redeemer or his earlier offspring. For this reason, when Boaz approached the nearer kinsman, the man was interested in the land, but would not take Ruth as his wife because the land would never belong to him or his posterity (Ruth 4:5-6).

When sin came into the world we lost the home God gave us, the Garden of Eden. But we have a Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed that beautiful land for us. Not only that, but with the land comes a 'woman', the church, who like Ruth has a history so shameful that it cannot be spoken of in polite society (more on that tomorrow). Thus Boaz, by his selfless care for Ruth, has given us a touching example of what Christ has done for us.

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! Ruth 4:13-14.

If ever a prayer was answered it was this one, for this child became the grandfather of King David, and thus a direct ancestor of Jesus. What might be difficult to swallow is that Ruth should be a part of this lineage. Why? Because she was a Moabite - a child of incest. You can read the story in Genesis 19:30-38. Such a history led the Jews to despise the Moabites as an inferior people, and the idea of Ruth being counted in the Messiah's ancestry would have been unthinkable to them.

If that is the case, why was Boaz willing to take Ruth as his wife? It was probably because Boaz, like Jesus, looked not upon her pedigree, but upon her heart. The story of Ruth's care for Naomi had reached his ears and he was touched. Thus Boaz was a type of Christ who looks not upon the outward appearance but upon the heart (1Samuel 16:7). As despicable as Ruth's background was, it was her conversion to the God of Israel that counted with Boaz. No doubt if she had remained an idolater he might have not redeemed her.

One big difference remains, however, between Boaz and Jesus: Boaz had no option but to be a relative of Naomi; Jesus, on the other hand, became our kinsman in order to redeem us. Not just a distant relative, but closer than a mother is to her child Jesus has become to us. No matter our ancestry or our past behaviour, once we entreat Him not to leave us or forsake us, we have nothing to fear, for He says, *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine* (Isaiah 43:1).

And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men. 1Samuel 2:26.

This is more an allusion to the boy Jesus than a Messianic passage. Nevertheless it has something to say about the Messiah, so I include it. Maybe Luke had these words in mind when he wrote: "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men"* (Luke 2:52).There is a sense of harmony in these words; intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual growth, all the basic ingredients of a well-balanced individual; all the ingredients a God-fearing mother wishes to instil into her child dedicated to the service of God.

Jochebed, Hannah and the Virgin Mary: three special women who faithfully raised their little ones amid the most difficult circumstances, and whose children grew into the greatest men of Israel and the world. Jochebed had only a few short years to train up young Moses so that he would later, in the face of absolute wealth and power, choose to identify with his parent's God. Hannah so raised her boy, Samuel, that even though she placed him into the hands of a man whose own sons were corrupt, the lad remained true to God his whole life, and later led Israel through one of the darkest periods in its history. Mary, the mother of Jesus, faithfully taught her son His true destiny, even amid the corruption of Nazareth, so that He too, when still a child, would say to her, "*Why were you searching for me?…Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* (Luke 2:49).

It is no light responsibility to raise a child, and no easy thing to get it right for those whose greatest wish is for their children to become servants of God. Maybe then there is insight for us in today's words: wisdom, stature, favour with man, and favour with God. All are equally important; none can be omitted and one cannot be emphasised above another. Yet these faithful women showed that with God's grace it can be done.

May 22 **The Faithful Priest (DEH)**

I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always. 1Samuel 2:35

Bible commentators seem to be flummoxed by this passage, and it certainly is a confusing one. Samuel appears to be the one referred to, for he was unique in Israel being judge, priest and prophet. Yet Samuel's sons were unfaithful, so can we say his house was firmly established? Could it be someone else?

A popular contender for the promise among commentators is Zadok. This is an appealing option - who has not heard Handel's magnificent oratorio first performed in 1727 at the coronation of King George II, and at every British coronation thereafter? "Zadok the Priest and Nathan the Prophet anointed Solomon King"[21].Furthermore Zadok's descendants remained priests until the end of the earthly dynasty. Therefore if Zadok was intended, the anointed one referred to is the succession of kings from Solomon to Jehoiachin.

Yet there is another faithful Priest whose house is firmly established, and who, like Samuel, is Prophet, Priest and Judge, and that of course is Jesus, High Priest of a better order, that of Melchizedek. But if the faithful Priest is Jesus, who is the Anointed One before whom He ministers? The Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, renders the words of today's passage, "…*He will minister before my Christ always".* For the Greek word *Christ* is the equivalent of the Hebrew word *Messiah* and means *anointed one*. So can Jesus be both the Anointed One and the One who ministers before the Anointed One? Well, why not? After all He is also anointed as The Prophet, as The Priest (of the Order of Melchizedek), and as The Eternal King of kings. Jesus is everything.

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[21] The words are taken from 1Kings 1:38-40, and say:
Zadok the Priest and Nathan the Prophet Anointed Solomon King
And all the people rejoiced and said:
God save the King! Long live the King!
May the King live forever, Amen, Allelujah.

…And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren. 1Samuel 16:11-13 KJV.

We now reach the life of David, the man after God's own heart (1Samuel 13:14). David is one of the great Christ-types of the Bible; the gentle shepherd whose great joy was to sing of his love for the Law of God. But this singer did not hesitate to throw down his harp to do battle with a lion, bear or wolf in order to protect his flock. Full of zeal for the cause of God, David faced Goliath with only a shepherd's sling and an unswerving conviction of the justness of his cause. This was a man who would allow no harm to come to his enemy Saul because the unfaithful king had been the anointed of God. This was a man who hated injustice with a passion, and displayed great compassion for those who were victims of it.

Yet for all that, David's personal life was one of sorrow and heartbreak as he experienced the moral disintegration of his family and the pointless death of four of his sons. It was his own sin that led his sons to lose their way. It began when the boys lost their righteous role-model after he murdered Uriah.

What then made David a man after God's own heart? It was his hatred for sin, especially his own, that set him apart. His repentance over the matter of Uriah was so deep that God would not even remember the incident (see 1Kings 14:8). It was not his behaviour, but his inherent purity of heart that makes David the great Christ-type that he is.

May 24 **A Wall Around Us (E)**

*One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. Yet these men were very good to us. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them.*1Samuel 25:14-16.

In today's passage, David has provided protection to his neighbour's flocks without the neighbour, Nabal, even being aware of it. Both night and day he was "a wall around us", recalled the shepherds, so that neither predator nor thief could approach Nabal's property. Yet Nabal was totally unaware of it, and David had made no effort to tell him; he just acted out of selfless interest in his neighbour's welfare.

Does God act any differently to those who believe in Him? Is He not like a Wall around us by day and by night? Yet we do not see Him, and He does not inform us of His presence. Not until the kingdom comes will we be able to see fully how God had led, protected and guided us during our lives.

As David protected the unseeing and uncaring Nabal, so God protects and supports, not just the righteous, but all the inhabitants of our world. He provides sunshine and rain for the unjust as well as the just, and does not withhold it just because it is not appreciated. But as Nabal met his day of reckoning, there will come a day when the world will realise God's involvement in this planet. Some will react like Nabal, and say, "So what?" Others, like Nabal's servants, will say "God has been very good to us – like a Wall around us".

Nabal means *fool,* and so he was a fool. We may not see God's presence, but we do not need to be foolish because we can't see it. For even in our worst moments He has promised us He will never leave us or forsake us (Isaiah 41:10), and that is all we need to know.

*David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us… The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.*1Samuel 30:23-25.

David had six hundred followers at the time; he was hunting down a raiding party that had stolen all their possessions as well as kidnapped their families. A third of his men were exhausted and David bid them remain behind to protect their equipment while the remainder, unencumbered by the equipment, were free to move swiftly in pursuit of their foe. On their successful return, some of the men were unwilling to share the spoil with those who had waited behind. The Bible calls them 'evil men and troublemakers'. However, David made it clear that all should have the same reward, for all were a part of David's army, and all had a role to play even if some did not actually fight.

Jesus encountered the same problem during His ministry. He experienced a similar selfishness among His followers. In response He might have recalled this example of David, but instead He told the story (Matthew 20:1-16) of a landowner who hired workers, some early in the day, others later in the day. However, at the end of the day all receive the same wage. To those who objected, the landowner reminded them that they were given exactly what he promised to give them, no more, no less.

The reward in serving God's anointed is not just at the end of the day, but in the service itself. What a privilege to have fought alongside David that day; he called them all his brothers. What a privilege to serve alongside the Master today; He calls us all His brothers and sisters.

David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years… And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him. 2Samuel 5:4-9.

Passages like this give us an insight into the mind of God. They help us to see that God has given us the Scriptures, not only as His revealed will, but also to be able to fathom the great depths of the plan of salvation. Maybe Paul had this in mind when he wrote of *the mystery of godliness* (1Tim. 3:16).

For example, today's passage mentions that David was thirty years old when he became king, and that he established his throne in Jerusalem seven years later. David therefore becomes a type of Christ who also began His ministry at 30 years of age and will also one day establish His throne in Jerusalem.

Yet there is more to it than that, for the real estate that became Jerusalem was originally the encampment of Melchizedek the priest-king of Salem (see Psalm 76:2 and Hebrews 7 for more thoughts on this connection). It is situated just walking distance from Moriah, the hilltop where Abraham offered Isaac. Thus, since earliest times, Jerusalem was a place God set aside as holy. Moriah is, of course, the place God, through David, chose as the site for the temple. Thus Jerusalem, the City of Peace, was to become the dwelling place of the King of Peace.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus reminded his hearers, "*Do not swear…either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King"* (Matthew 5:34-35).

May 27 **David's Humiliation (EH)**

David said to Michal, …I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour." 2Samuel 6:21-22.

A strange incident was a precursor to this conversation: the incident occurred the day David attempted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. During the journey one of the bearers put his hand on the Ark to steady it and was immediately struck down and killed. David was so upset by this that he refused to bring the Ark any further, and it was taken to a nearby home.

What had gone wrong? The problem was the casualness with which they were treating the Ark. Moses had been instructed that no man shall touch the Ark, for it is holy, and while the tabernacle equipment could be carried on carts, the Ark was always only to be carried by men using poles (see Numbers 4). By putting the Ark on a cart they had shown disdain for God's instructions.

David later came to understand this and when he resumed the journey it was done properly. He removed his royal garments and donned a simple tunic stopping every six paces on the journey to offer sacrifices.

When they arrived at the city, David danced with joy before the Lord, something which offended his wife, Michal, who despised him for making himself look ridiculous in the sight of the people. But David was not ashamed, and his reply foreshadowed the humiliation of our Lord. For the Son of God would later lay aside His royal robes in favour of a simple peasant garment in order to do God's will; and even those would be removed on the day of His great humiliation on the Cross. Yet, by doing so He would be highly exalted so that the name of Jesus would be above every name in heaven and on earth (Philippians 2:5-11).

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. 2Samuel 7:16.

To some, this looks like a failed prophecy, for David's dynasty lasted only until 586 BC when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the last king, Zedekiah, prisoner. To others, the earthly royal line of David still exists, and the heir to his throne lives somewhere in the world today. Of course, those who believe the latter can accept the Messiah only as a mere mortal who married and had at least one child.[22]

Yet God does not see as man sees, for man looks on the superficial while God looks on the deep things. "'...*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'"* (Isaiah 55:8-9). When God made today's promise to David He meant exactly what He said. For the line of David *will* exist for eternity, but not exactly as we, or even David, might have understood it.

When God made this promise He was looking to a better kingdom, one that would endure forever, not through a succession of kings, but under the benevolent reign of a High King whose reign would never end. Nevertheless, this King was to be a Man, born of the line of David, yet a Man worthy to wear the title "*King of Kings and Lord of Lords"* (Rev.19:16).

Who could be such a Man? Where will He be found? Must we, like John, weep because no-one can be found who is worthy (Revelation 5:4)? No, we do not need to weep because there is such a Man: He is the *Lion of the Tribe of Judah* (v.5), and He is worthy because He has overcome sin and Satan. But be prepared for a surprise when you see Him, for the Lion is a Lamb, and this Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev. 17:14).

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[22] This idea has become the basis for highly fanciful conspiracy theories including the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown.

May 29 **The Righteous Ruler (E)**

David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people. 2Samuel 8:15.

Who were David's people? According to his illegal census, there were nearly 1.6 million fighting men (1Chronicles 21). For a single monarch to reign over so many people in absolute justice is a remarkable feat. Today's verse reveals David again as a type of Christ who will also rule over all His people, the redeemed saints of all nations and all generations, as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will do what is just and right for all His people, and shall reign over them forever.

Yet there is another insight into this passage; it is in regards to the territory over which David reigned. When the Lord first covenanted with Abraham, He said to him, "*To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt*[23] *to the great river, the Euphrates…"* (Genesis 15:18-21). God intended to give all this land to the Israelites as their territory, but He expected them to drive out the inhabitants in order to take it. Now that might sound like something an emperor like Napoleon would do. In this case however, God had given the nations in the region several centuries to repent and turn from their idolatry, and they had refused. Therefore, when their cup of iniquity was full, God used the Israelites to punish them (as He later used the Babylonians to punish Israel – see Habakkuk 1:6).

It was David who finally subdued these nations and extended Israel's borders to the boundaries God had promised Abraham (1Kings 4:21). Thus, not only did he rule in justice, but he also ruled the entire land that God had established for His people. In the same way, God intended our planet to be the territory of the redeemed, but they will not fully possess it until the King drives out the 'Canaanites'. Then King Jesus will rule in righteousness and justice, and He shall be our God, and we shall be His people.

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[23] Not the Nile, but a river in the Gaza region separating Palestine from the Arabian Peninsular.

David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" 2Samuel 9:1.

This is a story about righteousness. Since the death of Jonathan there was none left of Saul's family who did not despise David. Yet, he did not feel the same about them. He was reflecting one day on his love for Jonathan when it occurred to him that maybe there was still someone left whom Jonathan would have wanted him to help.

Well, it turned out that Jonathan had a son called Mephi (actually Mephibosheth, but that's a real mouthful) who was handicapped due to a childhood accident. As soon as David learnt this he sent an invitation to Mephi to come and live in his palace. No doubt Mephi was terrified; David was his enemy who had overthrown his dynasty. Mephi, after all, had been an heir to Saul's throne. Yet David was sincere and said to him, "*Don't be afraid…I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table"* (v.7).

Can you picture poor Mephi that first meal at David's table? The royal household looks on as this 'dead dog' (v.8) stumps into the dining room on crutches, his deformed feet hanging useless below him. At last he manoeuvres himself awkwardly into position to hide his defects from royal eyes. He must have wished the floor would open up and swallow him.

We are like Mephi: deformed by sin and unfit for the table of the King; we too are 'dead dogs'. Yet the King says to us, "Don't be afraid…I will restore to you the land that belonged to your grandfather Adam, and you shall eat at my table forever." Then He presents us with the robe of His Righteousness, and we become a part of the royal household to "*dwell in the house of the LORD forever"* (Psalm 23:6).

May 31 **The Woman of Tekoa (EG)**

But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father's family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt." 2Samuel 14:9.

The Torah says: "*Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death"* (Numbers 35:31). Therefore, when the woman of Tekoa came before David's throne to plead with him to spare the life of her murderer son, she was asking David to break the law on her behalf. Were David to order the acquittal of her son, he would be placing himself in a position of being the lawbreaker, and would become the guilty party.

This incident, although actually a ruse to get David to forgive his son Absalom, teaches an important lesson about the Gospel. When we commit a sin, even murder, we have complete assurance that we can, if penitent, come to the throne of grace and receive full pardon. However, the law of God still stands, and in order for God to forgive us, He assumes responsibility for our sin. Seeking to release David from this responsibility, the woman of Tekoa said to David, *"Let the blame rest on me"*. Similarly, when God forgives our sins, He effectively says, "Let the blame rest on Me". Then we are free, but He must pay the price, for the law still stands.

Maybe it is the same for us when we forgive; for that way we take the sin against us upon ourselves. Maybe that is why it is so hard to forgive, because by forgiving our neighbour we are, in some way, taking responsibility for his crime. Maybe that is why Jesus said, "… *if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:15).

Of course, David did pardon the 'murderer'. After all, he was a man after God's own heart. So as God forgives us, so we will forgive others, for He also wants us to be people after His own heart.

June 1 **Pride Before a Fall (E)**

And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice." 2Samuel 15:4.

There was no man more handsome and popular in all Israel than David's son, Absalom. Like a modern-day celebrity, he was adored wherever he went. Yet he was not satisfied; he wanted more. He wanted his father's throne for himself. Now God had chosen David to be king over all Israel, and had even ordained his anointing on three different occasions as though to emphasise His choice (1Samuel 16:13, 2Samuel 2:4, 5:3). Yet Absalom set out by subterfuge to make the kingdom his. He subtly and discreetly began to undermine confidence in David by questioning his justice and goodness. In this way he was able to deceive the people into believing that he would be a better choice of king than his father.

Is there something familiar about this story? Didn't something like this happen in heaven when Lucifer rebelled? God had established His Son, through Whom He created all things, as His special representative. Lucifer was a created being, albeit a glorious and highly exalted one, but one whose heart became proud because of his beauty and glory (Ezekiel 28:17, Isaiah 14:13-14). Lucifer became jealous of Christ and sought, by deception and inference, to exalt himself even above the Son of God. Absalom's rebellion plays out this conflict; he was not the one ordained to bear the Seed.

No saying is truer than that *pride goeth before a fall*, and Lucifer's attempts to exalt himself resulted in his descent from exalted angel to prince of the bottomless pit (Revelation 20). Absalom's rebellion played out this heavenly conflict as he attempted to exalt himself above David. Yet just as Lucifer will come to nothing, so Absalom died hanging by his magnificent hair from a tree, and the Bible says, "*Cursed is anyone who is hung on a tree"* (Deuteronomy 21:23).

June 2 Araunah's Threshing Floor (EF)

But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and .paid fifty shekels of silver for them. David built an altar to the LORD there…2Samuel 24:24-25.

Pride led David to order a military census; now he was forced to watch helplessly as seventy thousand of his citizens died by plague as punishment for his action. How strange, we think, that David's punishment should be the death of so many innocents. Could he alone not have been punished? Was God being fair?

God never takes away without giving something better in return. From our perspective, death seems to be the ultimate event, but to God our life here and now is the prelude to a life of glorious immortality. We must all die one day, and the life we live here and now is to prepare us for that glorious life. Some have longer than others to prepare for that life. Of the seventy thousand who died that day, some died in their sins, others died being innocent, and although the latter closed their eyes in the sleep of death, their next awareness will be of the voice of their God wakening them to immortality.

God had a plan: to provide legal justification for sinners once again to find access to God. The legal justification required a sacrifice, and the sacrifice required an altar, and the altar required a temple, and the temple required Araunah's threshing floor. Araunah offered the floor and the oxen without cost. But David, knowing that a sacrifice costing nothing is no sacrifice at all, insisted on paying fair value. As soon as the oxen were sacrificed the plague was stopped. Was God fair in what He did that day? That day provided the site for Solomon's Temple, one of the great wonders of the world, and one day the innocents who died in the plague will arise to see God's mercy. You can't get much fairer than that.

*God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man…and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.*1Kings 4:29-31.

Solomon's coronation marked a transition in the history of Israel. Until that time the nation had been establishing itself, albeit with faltering steps, as the people of God's vision. David finally secured the borders originally promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-19) and to Joshua (Joshua 1:4). Now, with the fighting over, and the building of a permanent temple commissioned, Israel was to become the greatest nation in the world, the dwelling place of God on earth. At its head was a king who was nobler, wealthier, and wiser than any other king who has ever lived. Israel was to become a showcase to the world of what God planned for mankind, the fulfilment of the promise of Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

The consolidation of Israel under Solomon foreshadowed the day when spiritual Israel will finally be established under King Jesus. Just as David fearlessly overcame his enemies, so God's last day people will faithfully face the Goliaths that oppose them, and allow God to fulfil His plan through them. Like David, we will stumble and fall, but in penitence will move on with contrite heart, forgiven and loved, to establish the borders of the Kingdom. Then the day will come when the King will be crowned and the Kingdom secured for all eternity.

The King's wisdom will surpass the wisdom of any who ever lived, and His fame will extend throughout the universe so that all will come to worship Him. Unlike Solomon, He will not build a Temple because He *is* the Temple (Revelation 21:22). There will be no sacrifice there because He *is* the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.

June 4 **Where God Dwells (E)**

He prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the LORD there. The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. 1Kings 6:19-20.

There are just two cubic dimensions given in the Bible. The first is our passage for today which refers to the Most Holy Place of Solomon's temple where each dimension is 20 cubits (about 30 feet, or 10 metres). The second is the New Jerusalem which will descend from heaven to the earth after the final judgment. Both these cubes have something in common; they are the dwelling place of God.

When Solomon placed the Ark of the Covenant into the Most Holy Place, the Temple was filled with glory, and Solomon said*, "I have indeed built…a place for you to dwell forever"* (1Kings 8:13). Similarly, John sees the New Jerusalem descending from heaven with a voice from heaven's throne saying, "*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them…"* (Revelation 21:3).

Who is the God who would dwell with us forever? It is the Lord, Jehovah, the One who created us, and the One who redeemed us. He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. His throne "*will be in the city…they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads"* (Revelation 22:3-4).

Why a cube? We are not told. Just as the Most Holy Place is lit with the glory of God's presence on the Mercy Seat of the Ark, so the New Jerusalem will be lit with the glory of God's presence on His throne. Thus the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary is a type of the New Jerusalem, the Most Holy Place of the universe. It is where God dwells with man, and where all will come to worship Him.

He [Solomon] *cast two bronze pillars, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits around…He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz…*1Kings 7:15-22.

The two freestanding pillars at the entrance to Solomon's Temple have fascinated people for thousands of years. Similar pillars are seen in several ancient mythologies as being the entrance to some mystical realm. They are also used in Masonic ritual today. Even some Christians see significance in the trigonometry of their dimensions[24].

If the pillars and their dimensions do have symbolic meaning the Scriptures do not say so. What we do know is that so far every part of the earthly sanctuary and its furniture has pointed to Jesus the Messiah. The foundation, the cornerstone, the priesthood, the sacrificial animal, the bread, the lamp stand; all are types of Christ the Great Antitype. Therefore should the pillars be any different? Why did Solomon place them there? They were not a part of the original design given Moses. Yet Solomon certainly intended them to glorify God, for the names he gave them were *Boaz* meaning *In his strength*, and Jakin, meaning *Jah shall establish*. If read as one, these pillars might say, 'In His strength Jah (Yahweh) shall establish'.

There are other pillars in the Bible. For example, a pillar of cloud went before the Israelites in the wilderness, cloud by day to provide shade, and fire by night to provide light and warmth (see March 12). These we have already seen to represent Jesus. Maybe Solomon wanted to remind his people that the Lord is still guiding and providing.

In Revelation 3:12 Jesus promises that all who overcome will be made a pillar in God's Temple and upon them will be written His name. In *His* strength *we* shall be established.

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[24] For example Isaac Newton in *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms,* published posthumously in 1728.

But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! 1Kings 8:27.

Solomon was thinking of God dwelling in the temple as Spirit. Of course, the answer to his question is yes, God would really dwell on the earth, for the record says that when the priests withdrew after placing the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, "... *the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple"* (8:10-11).

Yet Solomon's question goes deeper than that, for God will really dwell on earth, but in a more physical way than Solomon may have been thinking. That is not to say that Solomon was unaware of who the Promised One really was, for he must have understood that the temple services foreshadowed a divine Redeemer. Yes, God would dwell on the earth, for one day He would send His own Son into the world. Was His Son fully God? Of course - He calls Him His Only Begotten. To beget is not the same as to create. When you create something it is not the same as yourself, but when you beget someone you have brought forth something that is you. Man can beget only man, and God can beget only God.[25] Thus Isaiah will later write: "*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God…"* (Isa. 9:6).

Yet the question goes still deeper. The Son of God came to dwell on earth as Redeemer, but when redemption was complete He returned to His Father for a time – until the harvest of the earth is reaped and all judgment is complete. Then He will come again to dwell on the earth, this time forever. The Bible says, "*The throne of God… will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face…"* (Revelation 22:3-4).

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[25] This is well explained in C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Harper Collins e-books, location 2010.

June 7 **The Message of Elijah (E)**

Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." 1Kings 18:21.

Elijah is undoubtedly the greatest Old Testament prophet since Moses; in fact it is he who appeared to Jesus, along with Moses, on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is he who Malachi prophesied would return prior to the 'great and terrible day of the Lord' (Malachi 4:5).Furthermore there is some justification for linking Elijah and Moses to the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13.[26]

So who is this unique individual? What is the significance of his ministry and message? Is he a type of Christ? Or is it his message that makes him so special? He qualifies as a type of Christ in both his life and in his message: Like Christ, he miraculously provided food and raised up a child from death. That day on Mount Carmel when he challenged an apostate Israel with the words of today's passage, he brought about a revival in the land that turned people back to the worship of the true God. By so doing he became a forerunner of Christ who also came just at the right time to bring about a rebirth of godliness and to save His people from destruction. This, it must be, is why Elijah is so important: he comes at a time when God's people have reached the nadir of godliness, when they are on the brink of annihilation. In both Elijah's day and Christ's, God sent a prophet to revive them and save them from themselves.

Perhaps we have again come to a time when the world needs a prophet Elijah to bring about a revival of godliness in a world that has all but forgotten God and no longer believes the Scriptures. If a prophet were to come to us today, would his message be different from that of Elijah: *"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him..."*

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[26] The two witnesses had power to withhold rain from the earth for 3 ½ years, as did Elijah, and turn water into blood, as did Moses. They are also taken up to heaven in a cloud in the sight of men as was Elijah in the sight of Elisha.

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel… so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." 1Kings 18:36-37.

In today's passage Elijah asks God that the Israelites will know that He is turning the hearts of the people back to Him. In other words, that there will be a revival among the people. The incident at Carmel, and in a larger sense the entire ministry of Elijah, was all about revival.

Elijah's prayer is alluded to in Gabriel's words concerning John the Baptist, "*Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:16). Therefore John's ministry too was one of revival.

In Matthew 17:11 Jesus told the disciples that Elijah would one day come again to 'restore all things'. By this He meant that one day there would be a revival of such magnitude that hearts would never again be turned away. Malachi prophesied this revival to take place before the 'great and terrible day of the Lord' (Malachi 4:5-6).

There have been some great revivals in Christian history. Pentecost of course, the Reformation, the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, the formation of the Bible Society movements. All have brought about great revivals which have enabled the Gospel to be spread with unstoppable energy throughout the world. Now resources such as radio, satellite TV, and even solar-powered ipod, continue the work. And it will not stop until all things are restored. Are we a part of that revival?

"Go and look toward the sea," he [Elijah] *told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea."* 1Kings 18:43-44.

A Revival is often associated with the idea of refreshing, as though a sinful past is washed away leaving the people cleansed and refreshed. What, after a long dry spell, is sweeter than the scent of rain? It is appropriate then, that God should send rain at this time, for now the prophets of Baal are no more, the people have come back to the worship of the true God, and Israel is, as it were, born again. Now the rain comes and washes the land clean, settles the dust, and leaves a sweet aroma. Once again grasses grow and desert flowers bloom to bring life and vitality to the land.

Yet the rain did not come without prayer. Seven times Elijah prayed, demonstrating the need for persistence in prayer, but not until the seventh time did his servant report "a small cloud the size of a man's hand". In Revelation 14:14 we read of another cloud. Upon this one sits *One like a son of man*. He comes to reap the harvest of the earth at the last day. There is a lesson for us here, for just as Elijah prayed faithfully for rain, so we, a latter-day Elijah, must pray without ceasing for the coming of the kingdom. Jesus even mentioned it in the prayer He taught us to say, *"Thy kingdom come"* (Matthew 6:10).

Elijah's small cloud brought rain to cleanse the land and wash away the filthy influence (and the blood) of the false prophets. On the last day Christ will come in the clouds of heaven to cleanse the land once and for all of Satan's corrupt influence. Sin will be finally and completely washed away, and God's people will be refreshed.

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." 1Kings 19:1-2.

Just as Elijah's message is to be repeated at the last great show-down between Good and Evil, so the events in Elijah's life are to be played out again on a far grander scale before that 'great and terrible day of the Lord'. In that day Satan will even imitate Elijah's great Carmel experience by sending fire from heaven (Revelation 13:13). This will be Satan's great deception, for when the people see it they will believe that this is the Elijah promised in Malachi 4:5. But they will be wrong; it will be the Antichrist.

In today's reading Jezebel issues a death decree against Elijah. Similarly Satan will cause men to issue a death decree on all those who refuse to worship him (Revelation 13:15). As Elijah sank into the depths of despair, so this will be the darkest moment for God's people who will see themselves surrounded by enemies, forbidden to undertake the basic activities necessary to sustain life, and, like Elijah, will feel totally forsaken, alone, and without hope of any kind.

Yet in spite of Elijah's discouragement, God dealt tenderly with him, He sent an angel to provide food for him and then allowing him to flee to Mt. Horeb where Moses had received the Ten Commandments. Strange, isn't it, that whenever Moses and Elijah found themselves at that spot God always spoke to them in person. Not always with lightning and earthquakes though, for this time He whispered softly in Elijah's ear, *"What are you doing here Elijah?"* When you come to the Mountain of God He will talk to you, probably in a whisper, and remind you that there are still seven thousand who have not bowed to Baal, and that He still has a work for you to do.

June 11 **A Double Portion (E)**

…Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not." 2Kings 2:9-10.

At first reading it seems that Elisha is requesting twice the power of Elijah, but that is not the case. The double portion was the inheritance of a firstborn (Deuteronomy 21:17). Thus Elisha was asking to be considered as Elijah's spiritual successor. Such a request Elijah had no authority to grant, so he wisely and humbly referred the matter to God.

God did grant Elisha's request, and the young man's ministry turned out to be a remarkable type of that of Jesus. For Jesus, as God's Firstborn, also received the double portion of God's Spirit from His heavenly Father. Like that of Jesus, Elisha's ministry revolved around the establishment of a movement, in his case the schools of the prophets. His work was to build upon the revival brought about by Elijah so that a steady flow of young people would be trained as missionaries and teachers, and commissioned to take the Word of God far and wide. Sounds familiar, doesn't it*?*

It is not surprising then that Elisha should be such a miracle worker; and how similar his miracles to those of Jesus? One of his first was the raising of a boy from death (2Kings 4:18-36). Another was the feeding of one hundred men from just twenty small loaves of bread with loads to spare (v.42-44). Another, the healing of a man with leprosy (2Kings 5).There must be a reason heaven uses miracles at a time of evangelistic outreach; is it because they draw attention to the message so that more will come to listen? Is it because in the kingdom Jesus is establishing there will be no hunger, disease or death? Do miracles still happen? Oh yes! Those who take the Word far and near today can testify to that.

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more... 2Kings 2:11-12.

Elijah overcame his post-Carmel discouragement and went on to fulfil faithfully the work he had been given to do. Finally the day came when God called him home, and he was taken to heaven without tasting death, a privilege given previously only to Enoch.

This experience provides insight and understanding of last-day events. God's faithful ones will also emerge victorious from their dark experience to see Christ coming in all His glory to take them home. The Apostle Paul anticipated this day when he wrote, "*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever"* (1Thess. 4:16, 17). Just as Moses' resurrection (Jude 9) anticipates the raising of all who die in the Lord, so Elijah's translation anticipates that of the saved who are alive when Jesus returns. In this way these two great prophets represent all the redeemed.

When, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31), Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with Jesus, the astonished disciples saw the Kingdom in miniature. They were seeing a type of the great day when the Lord shall stand on the earth with all the redeemed - those who have been raised from death, and those who have been translated without seeing death – the kingdom in all its glory.

…When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite! Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'" "Everything is all right," she said. When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone…" 2Kings 4:25-27.

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This passage provides the first hint that there is a problem with Gehazi. The Shunammite woman is no fool, she is wealthy and astute, and she ignores Gehazi when it is to Elisha she urgently wishes to speak. When Gehazi tries to revive the dead child he fails. There is something going on here we are not told about; Gehazi has lost face. Therefore it is no surprise that he later turns out to be a dud (2Kings 5).

Elisha must have known that Gehazi had some issues, but he patiently laboured with him, always looking for the good in him, and it wasn't until he crossed a serious line that he took serious action. In this, Elisha prefigured Christ who laboured so patiently with His disciples; carefully nurturing them so that they would become the people heaven intended them to be. But Judas He could not. Like Gehazi, Judas had a different agenda, and although Jesus was well aware of Judas' true heart condition, He made no move to discredit him, but laboured with him until he finally revealed his true colours.

Jesus is just as forbearing with us today. In spite of our flaws He patiently leads us along the path to maturity so that we might become the people heaven predestines us to be. It is never God's intention that we remain as we were when we took our first faltering steps. His plan is to refine us into noble and gracious people of whom others will take note that they have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?" "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." 2Kings 6:21-22.

The Hebrew Scriptures have a reputation for teaching retribution and harsh justice: *An eye for an eye* (Exodus 21:24) is the order of the day according to the understanding of many. Therefore the soldiers sent to kill Elisha would have expected no mercy when they found themselves taken prisoner by the man himself. Elisha however, had learnt something different in his walk with God; he had learnt to love his enemy, and to show kindness to those who would hurt him.

How did Elisha learn this? The answer is he learnt it from Elijah as well as in his own humble walk with God. In fact the Hebrew Scriptures do not teach retributive judgment; they teach of a God "*gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy"* (Psalm 103). Yet men had great difficulty understanding this, and so when Jesus lived among them He went to great lengths to reveal the true nature and character of God, showing Him to be One who weeps over the lost soul lost, and who rejoices over the lost soul found.

Elisha was a great teacher in Israel, and by the end of his life he had become a man respected by friend and foe alike. Spiritual authority grants power like no other. Yet Elisha never allowed his esteem to go to his head, but remained humble till his dying day. True religion is not just taught, it is lived. Again Elisha foreshadows the ministry of Jesus who in an even greater way demonstrated that God is Love. Elisha teaches that the Old Testament is as much about being Christ-like as the New.

He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever. 1Chronicles 17:12-14.

God speaks these words to David through the prophet Nathan. They refer specifically to Solomon, but the frequent use of the word 'forever' suggests strongly that there is more to this promise than Solomon alone. In flesh and blood terms the dynasty of David did not last forever, it came to an end in 586BC when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, took its king prisoner and put all his sons to death. Since then there has been no earthly heir to David's throne despite what certain popular novelists try to tell us. Yet God says three times in this passage that the dynasty is forever.

There is an heir to the throne, He is mentioned by Dr. Luke, the Gospel writer who records the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary concerning Jesus: "*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end"* (Luke 1:32-33).

There are similarities between Gabriel's words and those of today's reading. One is that they both talk of a Father-Son relationship between God and the King. Even as a child Jesus understood this relationship even though Mary and Joseph presumably did not. When Jesus said to them, "*Did you not know I must be about My Father's business?"* they had no idea what He was talking about (v.50). Perhaps it was today's reading that led Jesus to teach us to call God, *"Our Father, who art in heaven".*

But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! 2Chronicles 6:18.

King Solomon spared no expense and effort to make a house fit to be God's dwelling place on earth, yet in spite of its bravura Solomon wondered how any man-made structure could be worthy of God. A thousand years later God really would dwell on earth with men, and the highest heavens would be able to contain Him because the entire glory of the Godhead was captured in the body of one Man.

Solomon began the temple's construction on Mt. Moriah, the site where Abraham offered Isaac to God. What more fitting place to offer the sacrifices that pointed to Christ the Lamb of God than the spot where Abraham had offered his own son. It took seven years of painstaking work under the finest craftsmen in the land to complete the temple, and when it was finished, it was the most magnificent building in the known world. The first nine chapters of 2nd Chronicles describe the glory of the temple and the wisdom of the one who built it.

The glory of Solomon and his temple anticipates the glorious millennial reign of Christ. However, there is a disparity in this figure; Solomon's temple does not prefigure a kingdom temple because in the kingdom there is no temple. It prefigures Christ, for He is the Temple. Perhaps this helps us understand Solomon's pedantry in the construction of the temple. The slightest flaw, even the noisy clash of hammer against iron and chisel against stone would render this work unfit for the symbol of the perfect Man it represented. Only the best materials available and the best craftsmen known to men were acceptable, and then not at Mt. Moriah, but away from that holy place so that the sacred work at the site could be conducted in reverent silence. For the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.

June 17 **Zerubbabel (EH)**

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 5:2.

The theme of the book of Ezra is Restoration. Ezra lived during the time following the seventy years captivity in Babylon, and has been commissioned to record the events surrounding the rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem and its temple. Restoration has two elements, Remnant – the restoration of a remnant of God's people in the Promised Land, and Law – the restoration of the Law of God among the people. Today we look at the Remnant, tomorrow the Law.

A remnant has certain characteristics that link it with its original. Just as the remnant of a bolt of cloth is identical in composition and pattern with the first piece that came from it, so God has always had those He identifies as His people. From righteous Abel to the end-time saints, all are from the same bolt. Their cultures may differ, but their belief and worship is the same regardless of time or place.

That these people will be present at the end of time is told us in Revelation 12:17: *"And the dragon was wroth with the woman* [God's people]*, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (KJV). These two identifying marks both concern the Holy Scriptures. Perhaps we might say that obedience to the commandments is the message of the Old Testament and the testimony, or witness, of Jesus is the message of the New Testament.

Zerubbabel is the man commissioned to lead the Israelite remnant from Babylon to the Promised Land. Their mission: to rebuild the holy temple of God, and to re-establish Jerusalem. Of the tribe of Judah, and descended from King David (1Chronicles 3), Zerubbabel is a type of Christ who leads His remnant people out of the Babylon of sin into the New Jerusalem. Thus the remnant culture and faith on earth will become the culture and faith of the saints in heaven.

This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given… For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Ezra 7:6-10.

Ezra was a Levite, a descendant of Aaron, who in 457 BC returned to Jerusalem carrying the famous decree from King Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem. This was the decree the angel Gabriel gave as the starting date for the 'Seventy Weeks' prophecy concerning the anointing of the Messiah (see Daniel 9:20-27).[27]

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem he was appalled to discover that the Jews who had come back with Zerubbabel had intermarried with the local peoples who did not worship God. So entrenched was the intermarriage that the entire religion and culture of Israel was under threat. In other words the very thing that had led to Israel's captivity in the first place was already happening again. Drastic action was required, and Ezra made it very clear that all those who had married foreign wives were to send them packing.

Ezra, as a younger man, had sought to educate himself in the Law of God. It became his joy to devote himself to the study of God's Word. As he did so he became a great teacher of the law which led to a great revival among the people. As his reputation grew, even Artaxerxes came to see him as "*Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven" (7:12).*

As Zerubbabel foreshadowed Christ leading His remnant home, so Ezra foreshadowed Christ the great Teacher of His people. As Ezra's revival was founded on the Word of God, so the ministry of Christ led to a great revival which still continues to this day, a true revival built not upon emotion or sentiments, but on a *Thus says the Lord.*

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[27] The decree authorised Ezra to '*appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates'* (Ezra 7:25). By this Artaxerxes was authorising Ezra to not only reestablish the priesthood, but to set up the infrastructure of the city of Jerusalem. When Ezra began to rebuild the city wall there was such strong opposition from the local population that the work was halted until 444BC when Artaxerxes authorised Nehemiah to complete the work.

On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them…When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent. Nehemiah 13:1-3.

Ezra's reading of the Book of Moses aloud in the hearing of the people became the basis for a great revival among the people, for it helped them fully understand the reason for their removal to Babylon. This revival among the people was completely genuine, and like the revival of King Josiah some 150 years earlier, it was based on the reading of God's Word.

This fact teaches a powerful lesson for those seeking a revival today; any revival, in order to bring about genuine conversion, must be based on the Word of God. No matter how stirring the preaching, no matter how popular the revivalist, if it is founded on anything other than the direct testimony of the Word of God it will not produce good fruit.

Nehemiah's work in completing Jerusalem's rebuilding, and in maintaining its purity, foreshadowed Christ's work in the preparation of the New Jerusalem for the redeemed. "*Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life* (Revelation 21:27*). Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood"* (Rev 22:15). These are they 'of foreign descent'. Similarly, those who are on the inside will have lived according to the light God has given them in His Word. For as Jesus reminds us, *"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws… Esther 3:8.

The book of Esther is seen by most readers, whether Jewish or Christian, as allegorical as well as historical. The nature of the allegory, however, appears to depend on the reader's worldview. Does the Christian find Christ in the book? Most do. But not all agree on exactly who the Christ figure is. Is it King Xerxes, the mighty emperor who wants the world to see the beauty of his bride? Is it beautiful Queen Esther who is willing to die in order to save her people from annihilation? Is it humble Mordecai who refuses to bow down to Prime Minister Haman? Each of these reveals an aspect of Jesus' character and ministry, but are they what the book is about? True, Christ longs for the world to see the beauty of His Bride. True, Christ was willing to die in order to save us. True, Satan could never get Jesus to bow down to him. But the Book of Esther seems to go deeper than that.

Our passage today reveals Haman's scheme to rid the Persian Empire of every living Jew. His grounds for so doing? Jews are different from everyone else and live by another set of laws (The Ten Commandments). Now this is a familiar theme! "*Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus"* (Revelation 12:17). Just as the dragon of Revelation 12 sought to destroy the infant Jesus, so Haman, should his plot be successful, would succeed in destroying the ancestral lineage, the Seed, of Jesus. But due to Esther's courage Haman's scheme fails and he ends up on the gallows he build for Mordecai. Praise God the dragon will also fail and will end up in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41).

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." Job 2:3.

When Job's 'friends' tried to persuade him that he must have sinned in order for God to bring such calamity upon him, he insisted upon his innocence. He would not allow these men to convict him of any guilt at all. In response, his three accusers, determined to find dirt, decided that his claim to innocence declared him self-righteous (Ch.35).

Yet Job was not self-righteous, he genuinely sought godliness, "*Have I not wept for those in trouble?"* he asks. *"Has my soul not grieved for the poor?"* (30:25). *"I have made a covenant with my eyes",* he adds; *"Why then should I look at a girl?"* (31:1).

Such an attitude toward others is unique. Who else in the Scriptures said such things? David? Certainly not - and he was described as a man after God's heart. Only One other could weep the way Job wept; only One other was to teach us to make a covenant with our eyes (Matthew 5:28-29).

Now we see what is so unique about Job; he, more than any other Bible character reflects the goodness of Christ. It was simply *because* Job was righteous that God permitted Satan to afflict him; it was *because* Job was 'perfect and upright' (KJV) that God removed from him all barriers of protection and left him completely exposed to the wrath of Satan. In this way Job prefigured the sinless Christ who, *because* of His sinlessness, permitted Himself to face the Enemy's diabolical hatred without an intercessor. We often wonder why the righteous seem to be singled out for suffering. Perhaps it is because God wishes to use them to teach us how to suffer in patience and dignity, and say with Job, *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21).

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! Job 19:25-27.

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, from Genesis to Revelation, one theme is found again and again; it is the theme of a coming Messiah who will one day set foot on the earth to right all the wrongs of the world. These promises do not, on the whole, look to a first or a second advent, just to One who is coming.

Job's vision was a little different. He foresaw a day when his grave would open and new life be given to his decayed bones. Job was not concerned with the temporal benefits a Messiah might bring, but with the spiritual blessings. He longed for the day he would see his Redeemer. One could almost say that while the Jews, through the centuries, looked for a first advent (although in misconceived manner), Job looked for the Second Advent, for it was the events surrounding the Second Advent that he longed for.

When Jesus came He helped His followers understand that the glories of the kingdom would not come until He returned the second time. With this understanding, the author of Hebrews would later write, "*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation"* (Hebrews 9:28 KJV). Job was one of those who looked for Him.

There is a lesson for us here. It is not the temporal blessings of the kingdom that matter; it is the spiritual. Yes, the physical will be beyond our wildest dreams, but the real blessing of heaven is that Jesus is there. That is what Job understood.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Ps. 1:1-3.

During the days following His resurrection Jesus said to His disciples, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms"* (Luke 24:44).

Well, we have covered some of what the Law says about the Messiah; now we come to the Psalms. Not surprisingly, we shall be here for a while. Some passages are directly and unquestionably Messianic (for example Psalm 22:16-18) while others refer primarily to David and his kingdom, but because David is a Christ-type, refer to Messiah through him. Tomorrow's reading is one of those. There are also some verses that seem not to be Messianic, but are mentioned by a New Testament writer as being so (for example Ps. 34:20). These we treat as Messianic because we believe the New Testament authors to be '*holy men of God moved by the Holy Spirit*' (2Peter 1:21). As we look at the Psalms we shall see a biographical sketch of Jesus; His godhood, His manhood, His incarnation, His sufferings and His glory[28].

In Luke 24:44, already referred to above, Jesus wished to open the disciples' still rather bigoted minds to the great truths of salvation. So, v45 tells us, *"He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"*. We can almost hear the penny dropping as these humble men suddenly saw the big picture. From now on they were no longer fishermen; they were fishers-of-men, the men described in the verses for our reading today. These words also describe the person He plans for us to be.

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[28] This is well explained in the website: http://www.westminsterconfession.org/worship/christ-in-the-psalms.php

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed. Psalm 2:1-2 (KJV).

In June 1815 an alliance of European armies met on the battlefield of Waterloo to rid Europe once and for all of Napoleon. This vast army, under the overall command of the Duke of Wellington, defeated the self-appointed emperor in one afternoon and sent him to a remote island to live out his days. It is no easy thing to defeat a coalition of nations bent on destroying you. David, at one time (2Samuel 10), faced a similar alliance which together had one unshakeable goal: to rid the land of the king and his God. Of course they couldn't, and David would wonder, in this psalm, why they would even try.

A thousand years later, Christ's humble Spirit-filled disciples were reminded of this event as they stood before a council comprising all the *Who's Who* of Jerusalem. Herod, Pilate, Annas, Caiaphas, Gentile leaders– anybody who was anybody – were there, all, according to Acts 4, determined to stamp out the memory of Jesus the Messiah and his followers.

People still seek to eliminate Christ; eloquent sceptics, extreme socialists, fundamentalist atheists, religious zealots; it seems that the list of Christ-haters grows larger with each passing year. Today the number of Christians persecuted for their faith around the world is larger than ever[29].

God did not protect Napoleon at Waterloo, but He did protect David. Napoleon's empire crumbled, but Christ's church grows ever larger, and will continue to do so until *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea* (Habakkuk 2:14).

[29] There are several websites dedicated to this subject. One site, www.opendoors.org, claims that up to 100 million Christians are being persecuted for their faith (2013).

June 25 **The Begotten Son (C)**

I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Psalm 2:7 KJV.

Many have speculated as to when 'this day' was. Was it in eons past? Was it the day Jesus was born in Bethlehem? What does 'begotten' mean? The nature of Christ is a mystery that we shall probably never even begin to understand until the kingdom comes. Both Luke (Acts 13:32-33) and Paul (Romans 1:3) link this passage to the resurrection. They are not saying that Christ was begotten at the time of the resurrection, but that the fact of the resurrection declares Him to be the begotten Son of God.

Christ willingly gave His life to redeem earthlings, but the tomb could not contain such a Man *"because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"* (Acts 2:24). Thus when He arose He became the first-begotten from the dead, the Firstfruits of the harvest of saints to be raised at the last day.

On the morning of His resurrection Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "*Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father"* (John 20:17). That same evening Jesus said to His disciples*," It is I myself! Touch me and see...."* Touch me not;,touch me; is this a contradiction? Not at all! Between those two statements Jesus did ascend to heaven; John records the scene in Revelation 5:6, "*Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne…"* Imagine the jubilation in heaven when the risen Christ showed His nail-pierced hands to the Father and said, "Father is it enough?" What a magnificent scene is this, observed by all the inhabitants of heaven who cannot contain their joy, and sing with bursting hearts, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain..."* The Father looks on in satisfaction and declares, "*Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."* The sacrifice is accepted, Christ has become the prototype of all who, because of Him, will also be raised from death.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Psalm 2:8-9.

The Son is being addressed by the Father in these verses, and is told He will rule the nations with an iron rod. In Acts 17:31 the Apostle Paul makes it very clear who the Son is: "*For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."* Revelation 19:15 spells it out even more strongly: "*Out of his* [Christ's] *mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron sceptre."*

Now I don't know about you, but I don't really want to be ruled with a rod of iron. I had hoped Jesus would be a little more gentle than that. Fortunately, there is hope that life under King Jesus may not be that bad after all. In Psalm 23:4 there is another mention of this rod. It says, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me*." Now those of you who are Hebrew buffs can look up the word 'rod' and find it is exactly the same word as the rod in our passage for today. Some rod this; it both dashes to pieces, and comforts.

The explanation is simple; when the Bible refers to *the nations*, it is referring to those who have rejected God and His Son. In the book of Revelation the unsaved are always referred to as 'the inhabitants of the earth' or 'the nations'. In Psalm 23 David refers to his own saved relationship with the Ruler. This Ruler is like a shepherd, and a shepherd uses his rod to fend off predators. For the wolf the rod is fearsome, but for the sheep it is the greatest comfort.

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet. Psalm 8:5-6.

At first glance this passage seems to be saying that God made humans a little lower in status than angels. Well, maybe He did, but that's not the way one Bible writer understood it. For after quoting this passage in Hebrews 2:5-8, he wrote, "*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"* (v.9). In other words, this unidentified writer (who is generally accepted to be the Apostle Paul) applies the passage specifically to Jesus. And quite rightly so, for only the Messiah has 'everything under His feet'. The expression 'a little lower' is better translated, 'for a little while lower'. The Son of God, the Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of the universe, set aside His glory and for a little while made Himself lower than the angels so that He might taste death for every man.

What an astounding thought this is. It is so outlandish that scoffers today openly ridicule the Christian faith. The question as to what sort of a God would 'turn Himself into a Man' and permit Himself to be put to death, provokes great hilarity and mockery among many today. But they do not understand that God is our Creator, and we are His creation. It was love that motivated our creation, and love that motivated our redemption.

They also do not understand that because society has *en masse* rejected God, as it did in Noah's day, He is now undoing His creation, and will completely undo it prior to making a new heavens and a new earth wherein will dwell only righteousness.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Ps. 16:9-10.

Just as Job was able to assert, "*after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God"* (Job 19:26), so David knew that when his life drew to a close he would go to the grave with the full assurance of the resurrection. In the very next psalm he confidently wrote*: "in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness"* (Psalm 17:15).

Yet David, under inspiration, was writing of Someone far greater than himself. It was the Messiah who would not be abandoned to the grave, nor see corruption. The Apostle Peter, referring to it in one of the great addresses of the Bible, cried out*, "…let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). David spoke not of himself, Peter explained, but he spoke of the raising of Christ, that *He* was the One not abandoned to the grave (v.31). As a result of these words some three thousand people were converted that day, and accepted Jesus as their Messiah and Redeemer.

Today the follower of Jesus has just the same assurance of the resurrection as did Job and David. We have no fear of the grave, not because we deserve it, for we do not, but because the grave was not able to contain the body of Jesus. Because He was raised, so we, if we believe and follow in His steps, will also be raised. This is the blessed hope!

> I saw one weary, sad and torn, With eager steps press on the way, Who long the hallowed cross had borne, Still looking for the promised day; While many a line of grief and care, Upon his brow was furrowed there; I asked what buoyed his spirits up, "O this!" said he "the blessed hope".[30]

[30] *I Saw One Weary*, Annie R. Smith, 1852

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Psalm 22:1.

That Jesus uttered these tragic words from the cross does not make the text Messianic, yet they commence a psalm that is all about Calvary. This is the Psalm of the Cross. In Psalm 51 David confesses his sin which is 'ever before him'. But here is no confession of sin, for this psalm concerns the sufferings of the innocent. Neither is there acrimony; no desire for revenge or self-pity is found in these words, only the acknowledgment that God is holy; the praise of Israel (v.3).

Today when media reporters interview someone who has experienced an injustice, they ask, "how do you feel about what has happened to you?" Of course they are looking for emotionally charged sound bytes that will enhance their viewer ratings. Seldom do you hear the respondent offer forgiveness or give glory to God in their despair.

When Jesus took upon Himself the sin of the world, He did not simply take the blame for our sins and allow Himself to be 'punished' in our place. No, it was much more than that: when Christ was nailed to the cross it was Sin itself that was nailed to the cross. When He took our sins upon His shoulders He became Sin (see 2Corinthians 5:21). Just as Moses lifted up that hated snake in the wilderness, so Jesus became something hateful. Sin is odious to a pure and holy God, and such purity cannot abide sin's presence. That day on the Cross God withdrew from His Son, and the Son could not endure it. He who had been one with the Father from eternity could not bear the separation, and from his parched lips were wrenched the words we have read today. Yet, there was so bitterness against us, no self-pity over the abuse of His 'rights'; only, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"*.

June 30 **Mocked (DH)**

All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Psalm 22:7-8.

David, as far as we know, never experienced what he writes about here. So why would he write the words? In fact David was writing under the inspiration of God, and God was penning His experience through David. Put another way, Christ is the author of this psalm.

Sometimes Jesus seemed to act in order to fulfil prophecy. For example, He instructed the disciples to bring a donkey *"that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet"* (Matthew 21:4). However, in the case of the events that took place at the Crucifixion, no charge of manipulation could ever be levelled at Him, for they were instigated by His enemies.

It seems astounding that the Pharisees could not see clearly that they were fulfilling Psalm 22's prophetic words. For as Jesus hung dying they used almost the exact words of the psalm: *"He saved others…but he can't save himself...Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"* (Matthew 27:41-43).

Yet others did see. For it was God's intent that these words be spoken in the hearing of the multitude, many of whom had come from distant lands to celebrate the Passover. As they incredulously observed the events of Calvary, their sympathies were aroused, and their attention was drawn to the Scriptures so that they could plainly see prophecy being fulfilled in the death and resurrection of the Messiah. What irony that it was the tormenters themselves who drew people's attention to the Saviour. But then Jesus had said, *But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself* (John 12:32).

July 1 **True Thirst (H)**

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Psalm 22:15.

A potsherd is a broken piece of pottery, perhaps a broken water jug that can hold no water – a poetic way of describing severe dehydration. Jesus had taken no fluid since sharing the ordinance in the upper room the evening before, some twenty hours earlier. Yet when offered vinegar Jesus refused it. Why? Because it was a fermented wine concocted to dull the senses, which provides two reasons for His refusal: firstly, Jesus wanted nothing to cloud His mind that might give Satan an opportunity to mitigate the value of the sacrifice. Secondly, He had made a promise that He would not drink wine again until He drank it with the disciples in the kingdom; in other words, He had taken the Nazirite vow (see April 21).

It is tragically ironic that He who had said to the woman at the well, "*Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again"*, and to the Jerusalem crowd*, "If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink"* (John 4:14, 7:37) should be subjected to such maltreatment. Yet He had been talking of spiritual water, the kind that refreshes the soul and offers eternal life. God wishes us to have a quality life on this planet, but He wants far more that we have eternal life with Him in heaven

We know when we are thirsty because our body has a way of telling us. But how do we recognise our spiritual thirst? It seems that those who best recognise their spiritual need are those who are also poor in what the world has to offer. Perhaps this explains why the Gospel of Jesus is accepted so much more readily in the poorer nations of the world. We must all ask God to give us the sensibility to recognise when we are truly thirsty. *"Happy are those*", Jesus said, *"who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6).

July 2 **Surrounded (H)**

Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. Psalm 22:16. [31]

This passage hints of something larger than the group of scoffing religious leaders at Calvary. The image of the dogs brings to mind a clan of hungry hyenas gleefully gloating over the feast they are about to enjoy. It was not only men who were in a frenzy that day, but evil angels led by Satan himself were in the crowd in human form whipping up demonic hatred toward the Innocent on the cross.

Why was Satan so intent on the destruction of Jesus? Because, while Jesus lived, the Accuser's evil schemes would never bear victory. Ever since Israel was a nation the evil one had been trying to destroy it. From Pharaoh's infanticide to Herod's, Satan had tried to snuff out the promised Messiah. Time after time he failed, and as Jesus grew to manhood, the tempter's only hope was to entice Him into worshipping him. Again he failed. What was he thinking of? Did he think that because he had enticed Israel into worshipping him that he could do the same to Jesus? Now the father of lies had only one shot left, Calvary, and if he failed here his whole battle plan was undone. He must kill Jesus and make sure that His body is eternally sealed in the tomb as a witness to His death. This was all or nothing for Satan, and praise God it was nothing. Now Satan prowls the earth in a fury because he knows his time is short (Revelation 12:12).

Yes, the devil is a defeated foe today, but the conflict is not yet over because, like all narcissistic tyrants, he still clings to the vain idea that he can be what he is not. So, instead of admitting defeat and handing himself in, he plans to take as many as possible to destruction with him, and prowls the earth like a roaring lion looking for a meal (1Peter 5:8). The good news is that if we remain close to Christ, the lion can never touch us.

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[31] There is considerable uncertainty about the meaning of the expression 'they pierced my hands and my feet'. Several early manuscripts have the Hebrew verb 'they pierced', and others use an almost identical word meaning 'like a lion'. No New Testament writer quotes this phrase, so possibly they also preferred not to consider it Messianic.

They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. Psalm 22:18.

No amount of engineering could bring about the fulfilment of these words; the Roman soldiers were unlikely to be aware of Psalm 22. John's Gospel (19:23-24) explains best what happened: whatever inner garments Jesus wore were torn up and shared among the soldiers. The outer garment, however, was of one piece and more valuable intact than in pieces. Perhaps, like Joseph's multicoloured coat, this garment was the work of loving hands.

The inference of this passage is awkward; it implies that Jesus was hung naked on the cross. No strategically placed cloth to make our artworks acceptable; Jesus' humiliation was total. Why such degradation? If we could comprehend how offensive is sin in the sight of heaven; if we could clearly see how unholy we are in comparison with a holy God; if we could taste the dregs that would have to be drunk in order for corrupt humans to be restored to the image of their Creator, then maybe we would catch a glimpse of what Jesus allowed Himself to suffer in order to save us. 'He was treated as we deserve that we might be treated as He deserves'[32]. We are "*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked"* (Revelation 3:17), but Jesus became just that in order that we might be clothed in the seamless robe of His Righteousness. Should we suffer any pain, grief or humiliation that Jesus did not also suffer, then Satan would have claimed the sacrifice to be inadequate, and the power of God insufficient for our salvation.

Whenever the high priest was to offer a sacrifice he would remove the splendid robes of his office, and would offer the sacrifice in the plain linen tunic worn by ordinary priests. So Jesus laid aside the glorious robes of His righteousness and offered Himself, the perfect High Priest, the Perfect Sacrifice.

[32] Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, p.25.

July 4 **Christ Our Brother (CD)**

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. Psalm 22:22.

The passage says, "*I will declare your* [God's] *name to my brothers".* While David might have been thinking of his siblings, Christ, who is really the writer of this psalm, includes all who do His will as His brothers (Matthew 12:50). In fact the writer of Hebrews quotes this passage to show that all who are sanctified by Christ are one with Christ. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are One. For this reason, he argues, Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:10-12).

However, the name of God is more than just a means of identification, in the Bible names represent character. Thus when we read in the book of Revelation that God's people have His name on their foreheads, it is saying that they will have assimilated His character; they will have made Jesus so much a part of their being that they will have become like Him. They will have become, like David, people after God's own heart (1Samuel 13:14).

Yet there is further insight into this passage; during Jesus' ministry on earth, the character of God was much misunderstood, just as it is today. Satan's plan has always been to misrepresent God as a stern judge whose purpose is to administer punishment. Jesus came, as well as to pay the price for our sins, to reveal the true nature of God. He called God 'Our Father', and spoke of Him in terms of love and compassion. His parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is perhaps the most sublime story of God's love ever told. With this and other parables, and in His caring empathy with the people, Jesus declared the name of God to His brethren. We are bidden also to reveal God's love to men, not just by our words, but in our lives, so that when people see us they will also be drawn to God.

…Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me... Psalm 23:1-4.

This psalm caresses the human soul. It calms our deepest fear, that ultimate and unknown enemy we must all one day face. In order for his rod and staff to comfort the sheep, the shepherd must be in the valley with them. So, when we walk through our dark valleys, Jesus does not stand on the ridge above yelling encouragement, but walks with us in the valley because He too has been there.

Psalm 22 portrays Calvary; it is the Psalm of the Crucifixion. In Psalm 23 the humiliation is over; the 'bulls of Bashan' have ceased their roaring. Now Christ is at rest, He has completed the work the Father gave Him to do. The blood is shed, the sacrifice is complete, we are redeemed and Satan is defeated. Psalm 23 is the Psalm of the Tomb, and because He has been there, we can go there without fear, for there is nothing we will face that He has not faced.

Jesus said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me…and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). Psalm 23 describes the true rest that comes to those who have complete confidence in their Shepherd. On February 19 we read that for a sheep to lie down it must be free of fear, friction with other sheep, insects, and hunger. This is the type of rest Jesus offers, free from the guilt of sin, free from fear of the future. On that great day when Christ shall return in glory to gather His own, they shall enter together into that great and perfect rest. *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them."* Revelation 14:13.

July 6 **The King of Glory (EH)**

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory. Psalm 24:7-10.

In Revelation 5 we read of a glorious scene in heaven in which John sees a sacrificial Lamb that had been slain. The Lamb is standing in the centre of the throne, and around him are all the inhabitants of heaven, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand angels. They are rejoicing and praising the Lamb because He has won a great victory. He has given His life to redeem men, and now He is alive. All of heaven cries out in jubilation:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"

Even the creatures of earth join in the refrain:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

What event could empower such a glorious scene? What event could lead the entire universe to sing and shout the Lamb's praise? It is the triumphant return of the Saviour. He has risen, and now has ascended to heaven, and all of heaven is there to welcome Him. We can almost hear the keepers of heaven's gates jubilantly cry out these words of Psalm 24 as they command the majestic gates to open so that the King of Glory may come in. Psalm 22 the humiliation, Psalm 23 the perfect rest, Psalm 24 the triumphal entry of the risen Saviour.

July 7 **The Shame Despised (H)**

Into your hands I commit my spirit. Redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.…I am the utter contempt of my neighbours; I am a dread to my friends— those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead… For I hear the slander of many…Psalm 31:5-13

Many times during His early life in 'no good' Nazareth Jesus must have quietly recited this psalm to Himself. While not directly Messianic, it paints a vivid picture of the ridicule and rejection of his younger days. It may also have been going through His mind as He endured the suffering of that final Friday, for His last words on the cross were from verse 5, "*Into your hands I commit my spirit"* (Luke 23:46).

But why would Jesus have been given a hard time during His Nazareth days? The problem young Jesus faced was that He was different. Firstly, his mother came from that town, and as in any society where there is much religion but little spirituality, she, like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne[33], would never have been allowed to forget the perceived circumstances of her son's birth. Even Jesus' brothers did not believe her story (John 7:5).

Secondly, His goodness and purity would have brought serious torment from His peers. For even as a teenager He never sinned. How does a young man like this grow up in such a world? How did Jesus escape the inferiority complex and personality disorder that would normally result from such treatment? Because He made the Word of God His comfort, and communion with His heavenly Father His solace. He refused to accept the shame people wished upon Him. This psalm begins, "*In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness"* (Psalm 31:1 KJV). Here is instruction for young people today. Here is instruction for parents who see their children at the mercy of the school bully.

[33] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter.

July 8 **No Broken Bones (CD)**

A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. Psalm 34:19-20.

This passage could discourage those who have broken a bone that they are not considered by heaven to be righteous. Presumably David was not saying that godly people will never break a bone, but that those who live according to God's ways will tend to safety. For the Apostle John however, the verse had a different meaning. He wrote concerning the death of Jesus, "*these things were done,"* he wrote, "*that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken"* (John 19:36).

Why was it prophesied that Jesus would have no broken bones? Because God had instructed the Israelites in the early days of their nationhood that the Passover lamb, once slaughtered, should not have any of its bones broken. Moses wrote: *"It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones".* (Exodus 12:46). The Passover was the only sacrifice that forbade the breaking of a bone. At other times the bones could be broken to extract marrow. However, the Passover was to be eaten in great haste, for the angel of death was at hand. Therefore just as the Passover lamb was treated differently than other sacrifices, so Jesus was treated differently than the other prisoners.

The safety and deliverance of the Israelites depended entirely on their strict adherence to God's instruction. Any delay in eating the Passover could result in their not being ready to leave Egypt on command. Today our situation is just the same; time is short, for the coming of the Lord draws near. We must eat now for the destroyer is at hand and we must be ready to leave 'Egypt' for the Promised Land on command.

Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; but a body hast thou prepared me: whole-burnt-offering and sacrifice for sin thou didst not require. Then I said, Behold, I come: in the volume of the book it is written concerning me, I desired to do thy will, O my God, and thy law in the midst of mine heart. Psalm 40:6-8 (Septuagint[34]).

Prior to Satan's rebellion the culture of heaven was such that its inhabitants thrilled at the opportunity to do God's will. Their joy was His service. The idea that there was Law in heaven did not occur to them until Lucifer challenged it, for it was written on their hearts. Thus when the Son of God became a man, His greatest delight was to do the will of God. He said, "*I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me"* (John 5:30). God's will led Jesus to Calvary, yet He went joyfully because God's service was His delight.

Why was it God's will? Because God's Law is a transcript of His character. Why was it God's will? Because when man first transgressed God's Law, a rift developed between God and man that could be repaired only by the shedding of blood. Why was it God's will? Because God has found people on earth who also delight to do His will, and He was prepared to go to any length, even the Cross, to have them with Him in heaven that they too might join those angels in joyful service.

Every type of offering is covered in this passage so that the entire Law of God is met in the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The sacrificial system God established on earth covered His entire will for His people, and Christ, in His life and death, perfectly fulfilled that will. Yet it was not the repeated sacrifice of livestock that brought pleasure to God - that only symbolised the kind of obedience God desired. What He really wanted – and still wants – is the heart that delights to do His will. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10 KJV).

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34 The Translation of the Greek Old Testament Scriptures, Including the Apocrypha. *Compiled from the Translation by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton 1851.* This passage is confusing to both Jewish and Christian scholars. Most manuscripts have *'but my ears you have pierced'* where the Septuagint has *'but a body you have prepared me'*. This means that the apostle who wrote Hebrews accepted the Septuagint as the correct rendering, and referred to it in discussing the incarnation of Jesus the Messiah.

July 10 **Betrayed (BD)**

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. Psalm 41:9.

When King David's much loved son, Absalom, led a rebellion against his godly father, it was Ahithophel who was to provide the young rebel the assistance and counsel he sought. No one knew David's mind and plans better than Ahithophel, for he had been the king's trusted advisor in all matters of state. It was undoubtedly this man David referred to in this Psalm. You can read the story in 2 Samuel, Chapters 15-17.

Ahithophel, in betraying 'the man after God's own heart', prefigured Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Just as Satan entered the heart of Ahithophel, so *"…Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve…"* (Luke 22:3-6). While David appears to have been surprised by his friend's betrayal, Jesus was under no delusion about the nature of this so-called disciple. After washing His disciples' feet, including those of Judas, He told them*, "…you are clean, though not every one of you…But this is to fulfil the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me'* "(John 13:10-21).

Jesus washed Judas' feet, but Judas was still not clean. Cleanliness comes, not just from washing our feet, but from taking a bath. Then, when our feet get dusty all we have to do is wash them to be clean again. If we wash our feet without taking a bath first, we have done nothing. Judas had never forsaken his sinfulness; he was not converted, and therefore was not clean even when Jesus washed his feet.

There is a lesson for us here: to be a disciple of Christ I must allow Him to wash me thoroughly of my past sinfulness, not just to go through the motions of baptism, but to truly repent and turn away from my sin. Then, when I slip up and get things wrong, I can allow Him to wash my feet, and I will be clean again.

July 11 **The Gold of Ophir (C)**

Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. Psalm 45:6-7.

This joyful psalm sings of the marriage of a king. Some believe it refers to Solomon because the language is similar to that of The Song of Solomon. But why would Solomon be referred to as God? The word for 'God' here is *Elohim,* the same word used for the Creator in Genesis 1. Some translators have tried to find other ways to word this in order to avoid the problem. The author of Hebrews, however, has no such difficulty; for him this psalm refers specifically to Jesus (see Hebrews 1:1-14). This is a truly Messianic psalm.

Christ is *Elohim, and* the joyful occasion of this psalm is the coming of Christ the King for His bride at His second advent. Who is His bride? Those who love Him are His bride. He has created her, He has redeemed her, and now she stands at His right hand adorned in the gold of Ophir (v.9). Her golden garments are His great gift to her - His righteousness. For He loves righteousness, and on this His wedding day He is anointed with the oil of joy that she is standing beside Him.

The joy expressed in this passage human language cannot do justice to. How does one put into words the happiness of heaven on such a day as this? One prophet expressed it like this: "*The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing"* (Zephaniah 3:17).

He will sing on that day, and if that is not good news enough, even greater news is that every one of us, no matter what our circumstances, has been invited to wear the gold of Ophir.

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men…that the LORD God might dwell among them. Psalm 68:17-18 KJV.

In days gone by an army returning victorious from battle would parade triumphantly through the streets of the city to be welcomed home by its king. In its train would be captives in chains as though to prove the extent of the victory. The city rejoices as the king gives gifts to his generals, who in turn, pass on gifts to their men. In the city that day there is jubilation and celebration, for the enemy is defeated and the threat is no more. The people are unified and happy as the tensions of war drain away leaving a nation feeling strong and united.

In this psalm David alludes to such an experience in his bringing of the Ark of the Covenant triumphantly into Jerusalem making gift offerings along the way (2Samuel 6:12-17). He sees in it a picture of God's glorious entry into His heavenly realm, accompanied by tens of thousands of angel charioteers.

The imagery of this passage also paints a picture for the Apostle Paul who sees in it Jesus' triumphant ascension to heaven accompanied by a million angels and bringing with him a cohort of those who have been freed from the captivity of death (Ephesians 4:1-13; Matthew 27:50-53). At Pentecost the King poured out gifts upon His people to prepare them *'for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith'* (Ephesians 4:12-13*).* He still gives those gifts so that we, His people, may continue to build up the body of Christ.

July 13 **Hated Without Cause (BC)**

Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal. Psalm 69:4.

Although not a well known psalm today, Psalm 69 must have been widely read in Jesus' day, for it is referred to directly or indirectly six times in the New Testament. In fact it is our verse for today that Jesus quoted as He explained to His disciples that even though He had done great miracles in their sight, the religious leaders still hated Him (John 15:24-25).

The fact that Jesus mentioned their antipathy toward Him reveals His humanity. Most of us do not like to be hated (although some seem to get a perverse pleasure from it). It hurt Jesus too, for He was fully human and very normal when it came to human feelings. Perhaps that is why he touched on this everyday human hurt. It wasn't the only reason though; He wanted His followers to understand that if people hated Him, people would hate them too. But why should Jesus be hated, and why should His followers be hated?

Jesus was good, and His goodness was a rebuke to the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. His followers, of themselves, are not so good; therefore it is not their goodness that leads them to be hated. Rather it is Christ in them that leads some people to resent them.

Hatred abounds today. Often it is undeserved, but often we bring it upon ourselves. Often it is simply the result of a misunderstanding. Jesus taught His followers to avoid hatred by being '*as wise as serpents and harmless as doves'* (Matthew 10:16). He also taught us to love those who hate us, that we *'may be sons of your Father in heaven'* (Matthew 5:44-45). In that way they can live, as far as possible, at peace will all men.

…zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me. Psalm 69:9.

This verse is quoted twice in the New Testament in two different contexts. John remembers it as he notes the passion which Jesus showed on behalf of the temple (John 2:17), and Paul quotes it in his argument that we should seek to build up others, even at our own expense (Romans 15:1-4).

There is a common thread in this couplet. The first phrase refers to Jesus' relationship with God, the second to his relationship with man. That is an idea which is not uncommon on the Bible. For example, when God created man He instituted the Sabbath as a day to set aside for worship, and by doing so formed a platform for our relationship with Him (Genesis 2:1-3). At the same time He established marriage as a foundation of our relationships with one another. These two institutions therefore govern both the vertical and horizontal aspects of human life.

Similarly, when God gave His people rules for daily living in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), the Commandments fell into two categories. The first four dealt with our relationship with Him – who to worship, why worship, how and when to worship. The last six instructed us how to relate to one another - our parents, our spouse, our neighbour, our community, even our thought processes.

David's all-consuming desire was to build a temple in which God would reside in order to be among His people. It was to this temple that the people would come, not only to worship God, but to deal with the breakdown in their human relationships through sin. In the temple God was worshipped and sins were forgiven. In that way the temple encapsulated both the vertical and the horizontal, our relationship with God and with each other.

Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. Psalm 69:20-21.

When the Last Supper had ended, Jesus led His disciples out to the Mount of Olives. Once there, a profound sorrow fell upon Him, so great that He felt He would be crushed by it. In agony of mind He gasped to His disciples, "*My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me"* (Matthew 26:37-38 KJV). After a distraught season of prayer, He returned to His disciples only to find them asleep. When He needed a friend the most, He was all alone.

We have little understanding of what Christ went through on our behalf. One day we shall understand it and fall at His feet in humility. Jeremiah the prophet was given a glimpse of it, and he wrote these dismal words in Lamentations 1:12: "*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger".*

Not only did the disciples flee from Him; not only did the people mock Him and torment Him; not only did they give Him vinegar to drink; not only did they crucify Him, but, as if that wasn't enough, the Father also turned away from Him. For the Son of man had taken upon Himself the sin of the world, and it crushed the life out of Him. But it was not for nothing He suffered thus; for *"he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.… He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities"* (Isaiah 53:5).

May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents…. May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. Psalm 69:25, 109:8.

Psalm 69 and 109 are imprecatory psalms, psalms which contain curses upon God's enemies. There are several such psalms, and they have troubled Bible students ever since David wrote them. How could 'a man after God's heart' write with such apparent hatred? Maybe we can learn something from the Apostle Peter who quotes today's passage in reference to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:20). Judas, by betraying Christ, allied himself with those imprecated enemies of God. Peter could have been much harsher with Judas than he was, he could also have quoted the next two verses of Psalm 109: "*May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes."* A few weeks earlier Peter would have almost certainly included those verses, but it was a new Peter, a born again Peter, who left them out, even though they probably came true for Judas. The ex-fisherman avoided any personal recrimination against his late colleague, for he had been with Christ and had learned of Him who knew no sin (2Corinthians 5:21). Peter had learned that it is not evil men that God hates, but the evil they do. Likewise, David, a man after God's own heart, would rail, not against the men, but against the evil perpetrated by the men.

No-one in whom the Spirit of God truly dwells can hate others with the venom apparent in the imprecatory psalms. This is the stuff of fanatical black-hooded militants, not humble men of God. It is not unholy men that God hates, it is the unholy things they do. We do not comprehend God's holiness; if we did we would hang our heads in shame. For all our virtue is no better than filthy rags in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). Yet He does not treat us as we deserve, but as with the fisherman of old, He bids us come and learn of Him who knows no sin.

July 17 The Blessing of All Nations (DE)

May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. Psalm 72:17

Our reading today is not quoted in the New Testament, yet it is all about the Messiah. Psalm 72 was probably written by King Solomon and the first few verses of the psalm seem to refer to himself. For example, he talks of ruling in justice, and of receiving gifts from Tarshish and Sheba. But then suddenly in verse 11 he is talking about something far bigger than himself, for he did not have all kings bowing down to him, nor did all nations serve him. It is not Solomon's glory that should fill the whole earth forever (v.19), but the Messiah's.

In Genesis 12:3 God first promised Abram that in him all the earth would be blessed. The promise was repeated three more times specifying that it was in his seed, through a descendant of his, that all nations would be blessed. Both Solomon and his father David were undoubtedly the most significant descendants of Abraham after the patriarchs, and were, in their own rights, types of Christ (David the warrior king who ruled in goodness and humility, and Solomon the king of peace who ruled in wisdom and justice). Both brought great blessing to Israel.

Yet it is only Christ the Messiah who perfectly fits the description of this psalm. For, as the Apostle Paul wrote, it is in Him that "*the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:14).

Yes, Jesus is the great Blessing this world needs. Yet no matter what language, culture or religion, all today use the name of Jesus as a curse word. This is Satan's doing. But, like Joshua of old, we can choose this day whether we will make the name of Jesus a blessing or a curse (Joshua 24:15).

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me, till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Psalm 73:16-17.

Psalm 73 is a lament about the injustice in the world. Why, Asaph complains, do the wicked prosper and have such easy lives? Why, even when they die they are comfortably at home, presumably surrounded by loved ones (v.4). In v.12 he wonders why he has bothered to live God's way when doing so has made his life so difficult. How many of us today ask the same thing? What if I've been denying myself the world's hedonistic pleasures only to find it was all in vain?

Asaph hits upon his solution to the problem in the sanctuary, that is in the house of God where is kept the Ark of the Covenant, and where the work of the priesthood is conducted. Asaph himself, as a Levite, had been appointed by King David as a sanctuary musician (1Chronicles 6:31, 39), and no doubt spent much time in the sanctuary, now located in Jerusalem. No doubt he often observed the priests going about their work, and had a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of the ceremonies conducted there. In them he must have seen the One to come to which they all pointed, and understood that the One to come would finally deal with the problem of sin once and for all time. The Sanctuary was at the centre of all Hebrew worship, and although it had become form and ritual to many, for those who studied carefully its deeper meaning, it became clear to them that its every aspect, from its construction, its furniture, its ceremony and service was a type and symbol of a better covenant, established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6). He understood that what he saw was only a figure of the true, that One would come who would enter into heaven itself to appear on the repentant sinner's behalf (Hebrews 9:24). What Asaph discovered is still there for us to discover, the true meaning of the sanctuary and the true end of sin.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old— what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. Psalm 78:1-4.

Parables were a longstanding method of presenting truth in Hebrew society. Jesus was not the first to use this method, but as Matthew put it, "*he did not say anything to them without using a parable"*, and by so doing fulfilled the Psalmist's words (Matthew 13:34-35).

Why did Jesus use this method? There are many reasons: as an aid to memory, as an aid to understanding, as a bridge from the familiar to the unfamiliar and the concrete to the abstract, to raise the hearers' eyes from earthly things to heavenly things.

Not only were parables a valuable teaching aid, but they were a protection for the Storyteller. By His use of parables, Jesus was able to present difficult truths, the true meaning of which may not have been fully evident to all hearers at the time. For example, in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-41) Jesus effortlessly brought the Pharisees to condemn themselves, while the less sophisticated hearers now had the information necessary to mull over the story and later understand exactly what He had been saying. In that way Jesus could present heavenly truths without providing any hard evidence for spies to use against Him. There is a subtlety about parables that makes them ideally suited to the hostile environment. As one commentary puts it, "Parables have the paradoxical quality of revealing truth to those willing to receive it, at the same time concealing it from those who would reject it".[35]

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[35] Horn, Siegfried H., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association) 1979.

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. Psalm 102:25-27.

The writer of Hebrews quotes this passage in Hebrews 1:10-12 as a part of his argument for the superiority of Christ. Taken on its own the passage could just be describing the creatorship of God. However, Hebrews 1:2 makes it clear that it is Christ who is Creator of the universe. John also starts his gospel by affirming that through Christ the Word, all things were made (John 1:3), and the Apostle Paul uses the magnificent language of Colossians 1:15-18 to demonstrate the incomparability of Christ the Creator. He writes, *"He* [Jesus] *is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."*

Psalm 102 tells us that while the heavens and the earth may pass away, Jesus Christ will never pass away. He will never change, but will remain the same forever and ever. No force, no power in the universe is greater than Jesus, for He is Creator of all. We humans often think that if we cannot see something then it doesn't exist. We assume the laws that govern the universe are limited to those we can define. But Jesus owns the cattle on a thousand hills that are beyond our vision, and is Creator of a thousand worlds we cannot comprehend. From the minutest molecule to the largest galaxy, all are created and sustained by one infinite Being, Jesus the Christ. And it is all because He is Love.

July 21 **The Messiah – Who is He? (BC)**

The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The LORD will extend your mighty sceptre from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. Psalm 110:1-2.

What do you think of Christ? Who is He? This question is fundamental to the Christian religion, and the question we must all eventually answer. It is not a question to be treated lightly, for our eternity may depend upon our response.

When Jesus asked this question of the religious leaders of his day they gave the correct answer that the Messiah was to be a descendent of David. But they were not prepared for His response; "If that's the case, how then does David call his son 'my Lord'?" By quoting our passage for today, Jesus was arguing that if David's son is also his Lord, then his son must have existed in heaven prior to David. Confusing isn't it? Jesus wanted His hearers to understand that He was that Son. *"Before Abraham was, I am"*, He had told them (John 8:58). Not only that, but He had backed up His claim by healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, and proclaiming the Kingdom to the poor. If that was not enough, He would finally demonstrate His Messiahship by coming back from the grave.

Maybe that is why we cannot escape the question, Who is Jesus? For some, even His resurrection was not sufficient to make them believe (see Luke 16:19). Some, like Nathanael, believed immediately (John 1:49). Others think that Jesus was just a good man, a gifted teacher. But as C.S. Lewis pointed out[36], Jesus has not given us that option. If a man claims to be God he is either a liar, a lunatic, or exactly what He claims to be. The challenge we must face today is to study the life of Jesus and decide for ourselves, what do *you* think of Christ?

[36] See note 5.

July 22 **Forever Perfect (C)**

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4.

Back in January 28 we read about Melchizedek, the one to whom Abram returned his tithe. His status as king of Salem and priest of God placed him in a special category in which no other man except Jesus has belonged. No other king could ever be a priest – in fact it was sacrilege for a king to take the role of priest as both Saul (1Samuel 13) and Uzziah (2Chronicles 26) found out to their great loss.

Yet the Aaronic priesthood, in spite of its sacredness, was only a type, or shadow, of a better priesthood, one that would last forever. The sons of Aaron were designated priests, not by merit, but by the law of their ancestry. Christ on the other hand, "…*has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life"* (Hebrews 7:16). This perfect life transcended the Law of Moses which stated that the priesthood must be of the tribe of Levi. For Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, and Melchizedek, came from no tribe at all.

What was it about Christ that so moved the Father to swear an oath that He would be priest forever even though not a Levite – even though He were a King? In short it was because Christ is forever perfect. The author of Hebrews, in Chapter 7:24-27, puts it like this: "…*because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself".* Some Priest this! Some King!

July 23 **The Stone Rejected (BCE)**

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Psalm 118:22-23.

This is the last passage in the Psalms directly quoted in the New Testament. Jesus applied it to Himself during a heated discourse with the religious leaders of His day. The discourse included His parable about some tenant farmers who killed every one the landlord sent to collect the rent. When he sent his own son they killed him too. Then Jesus, in no uncertain terms, let the leaders know that they were the farmers and He was the Son. This so incensed them that from that time on they began to seek a way to kill Him.

So powerful was this imagery that the Apostle Peter never forgot it, and, in dispute with these same leaders, again reminded them that Jesus was*, "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:11-12).

The capstone in this passage refers to the cornerstone of the temple. It is the stone upon which the entire building is lined up. It must be immensely strong and perfectly straight. Peter might have said, "There is no other stone in the temple by which the building is completely safe". Again we see Jesus: Jesus the Sacrificial Lamb, Jesus the Showbread, Jesus the Menorah, Jesus the Bread of Life, Jesus the incense, Jesus the High Priest, now Jesus the Cornerstone, and of course, Jesus the Rock on which the house is built.

How sadly ironic then, that He who is our all should be so rejected. In fact His entire life was one of rebuff. No room for Him in Bethlehem's inn; almost murdered by Herod; despised in Nazareth; finally condemned and executed by a people He came to save. Praise God it is not in vain.

The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne— if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever." Psalm 132:11-12.

What would have been the history of Israel, and of the world, if the Israelites had properly understood and believed the prophecies concerning the Messiah? He would have still appeared at the time decreed by heaven's calendar, but not just to a handful of shepherds and a few domestic animals. No, believers the world over would have been eagerly awaiting His arrival. No stable now; surely Solomon's palace in Jerusalem (which, of course, would still exist to this day).

If David's sons had kept God's covenant, there would have been no captivity, no occupation, and no time when a direct descendant of David was not on Israel's throne. Finally, *when the fullness of time was come* (Galatians 4:4), God would have sent forth His Son, born of a virgin queen and anointed Messiah in accordance with the prophecy of Daniel 9.

But what of the atoning sacrifice? O yes, it still had to happen, but under circumstances that a sanctified imagination will consider with caution. And the Resurrection? Certainly! Perhaps then the Firstfruits would also have been the full Harvest so that for evermore King Jesus would reign over His people in love, justice and mercy. Not just holy angels, but a godly people would then fully understand the nature of sin and the character of Satan for they would have seen him responsible for the death of their King. Then sin and Satan could be removed once and for all so that the words of Isaiah would finally be fulfilled: "*I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more…"* (See Isaiah 65:17-25).

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honour you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendour. Proverbs 4:7-9.

The book of Proverbs is definitely not Messianic in a prophetic sense. However, as in all the Hebrew Scriptures, Messiah is there. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote, "…*but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ* [is] *the power of God and the wisdom of God… It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption* " (1Corinthians 1:24-30).

Paul's words tell us that the wisdom of God is personified in Jesus - Wisdom in bodily form. It is His wisdom that provides our righteousness, holiness and redemption. As the child Jesus grew he increased "*in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men"* (Luke 2:52), and by the time He was twelve He far exceeded the religious leaders in understanding of the things of God. Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is not worldly knowledge and expertise, but a depth of understanding in spiritual truth that leads to a life of righteousness, holiness and redemption.

In Proverbs 8:27-31 we read, "*I was there when* [God] *set the heavens in place…when he established the clouds above … when he gave the sea its boundary…and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side…" [37]* Maybe the writer of Hebrews was thinking of this passage when he wrote of Jesus: "*In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands"* (Hebrews 1:10). Jesus is our Master Craftsman, not only in terms of physical creation, but in our sanctification.

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[37] Proverbs Chapter 8 is, for Christians, one of the most controversial chapter in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was used heavily by Arius and his followers to 'prove' that Christ is a created being. Even today, those who reject the Trinity use this chapter as their big gun. The problem arose when the translators of the Greek Septuagint translated 8:22 as 'created' – *The Lord created me as the first of his works*. Many other versions use the word 'possessed', as in, *The Lord possessed me in the beginning*... Be that as it may, the passage is a very strange one, and controversy will probably always exist over it.

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. Ecclesiastes 12:9-10.

We can easily picture the youthful Jesus sitting under a tree, chewing on a blade of Nazareth grass, deep in contemplation over the words of today's reading as He considered how to go about "My Father's business". The Hebrew word for teacher is *Qoheleth* –one who gathers the people together to instruct them. Maybe it was during those peaceful sunny days, as He observed the ways of man and nature, that he drew together the parables that would serve Him so profoundly during His ministry.

In Ecclesiastes it is not the subject matter that reveals Christ, but the Teacher. In fact, the key word in Ecclesiastes is essentially the converse of that of Proverbs. In Proverbs it is Wisdom, which we saw to be the personification of Christ. In Ecclesiastes it is Vanity and it describes the life devoid of Wisdom. In Ecclesiastes it is the Teacher who is wise.

A clue to understanding this book, as many commentators point out, is the phrase, *under the sun*. It occurs 29 times, and is found nowhere else in Scripture. What was the Teacher saying? He was referring to those who make this world their everything. Just as the book of Revelation refers to those outside Christ as *the inhabitants of the earth,* so those *under the sun* see nothing in life beyond the temporal. For them, all is vanity. For them, riches and poverty are all the same, for the rich and poor both end up in the same place.

But the Teacher has advice for those under the sun: *…Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man... (v.13).* Only then will they see beyond the sun.

I have taken off my robe; How can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; How can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved…But my beloved had turned away and was gone... Song of Solomon 5:3-6 (NKJV).

Christ in *The Song of Solomon*? You can't be serious! Yet what more beautiful illustration of the love of Christ for His spiritual bride than this pathetic scene? When I was a young boy at boarding school, a teacher had fallen in love with an *au pair* who was assisting the school matron. Her room was close to our dormitory, and I still vividly remember one night hearing this lovesick young man standing outside her door knocking again and again with no response. "I know you're there", he entreated, but to no avail. Finally, I heard his forlorn footsteps fading down the hallway, the ensuing silence broken only by the sobs of the girl.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me".* He is speaking to the church members at Laodicea, the last of the seven churches, and the one that represents the church of the last days. This is the church that thinks it is rich, but is, in reality, "*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked"* (v.17). This is the church that has grown so comfortable that it no longer needs Christ to come back. "*I have taken off my robe; How can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; How can I defile them?"* it says as Jesus knocks again and again on the door of our hearts hopefully pleading "I know you're there".

This pitiful passage beautifully illustrates the intensity of God's love for us. As a bridegroom delights in his bride, so God delights in His church (Isaiah 62:5). Will we also hear His forlorn footsteps fade down the hallway?

'Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Isaiah 1:18.

According to Bible commentators, the red dye used as a stain was impervious to rain and sunshine, and neither could washing remove it. Once red, the garment was red. Therefore Isaiah assures the people that no matter the depth of their sin, God will remove its stain from their soul. If they will put away their evil deeds, Isaiah promises, then God will regard them in terms of white and not red. It is not the sins themselves that become white, for they are removed far from us (Psalm 103:12), it is the sinner who becomes 'white as snow' because the record of his sin is eradicated. Isaiah does not provide the mechanics of how this will happen - that he will do in Chapter 53. The Apostle Paul, in Colossians 2:13-14, tells us that the record of our sin, once turned away from and confessed, is nailed to Christ's cross so that we may be white like wool. Some think it is the Law of God that is nailed to the cross, but that is not the case - it is the record of our sins that is nailed to the cross. That way our old sinful self dies along with them, and we are born anew, and the life we then live in the flesh we live in Christ (Galatians 2:20). That is the way God will provide the legal means by which we may be made white. In consequence John is able to see in vision the redeemed wearing white robes (Revelation 7:9-13).

In Matthew 27:27-28 we read the following: "*Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus…and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him"*. This event symbolised the taking upon Himself of our sin, for it is we who should be clothed in scarlet, and He who should be in white. But for our sakes He wore what is rightfully ours so that we might wear what is rightfully His.

Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendour of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth…They will flee to caverns in the rocks and to the overhanging crags from dread of the LORD and the splendour of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth. Isaiah 2:19-21.

This prophecy concerns Christ's second coming, not His first. Many of Isaiah's prophecies were conditional upon the Jews' acceptance of the Messiah. Had they done so the kingdom would have been fully established in the events surrounding Jesus' first advent, and the words of today's reading would have applied to His enemies of that day. However, their rejection of Jesus led to a new dispensation that included a bigger plan, albeit one that had the same result.

Isaiah's words are brought back to our attention in Revelation 6:12-17, which describe events at the second coming of Christ: "*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'"*

Both Isaiah's and John's words portray a frightening scenario. No one wants to suffer this end. The good news is that if we believe Christ's Gospel and accept His invitation to be a part of His kingdom, His second coming will not be a time of terror, but a time of the greatest joy imaginable. For we shall behold His return in the clouds of heaven and say, "…*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation"* (Isaiah 25:9 KJV).

July 30 **The Glorious Branch (D)**

In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Isaiah 4:2.

What a vision God has for His people. How sad we have never caught even a glimpse of it. Today's reading comes from a passage intended to give such a glimpse; just a glimpse mind you, because it is written, *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"(*1Cor. 2:9 NKJV). But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit which searches the deep things of God (v.10).

Isaiah 4:2-6 paints a picture of society when people have finally committed themselves completely to God's will. The context is Jerusalem after the return from Babylon, a promise of life for a humbled and penitent Israel. But it did not happen then, and so the promise is still future – the time when the filth of sin is washed away and we are at last called holy. It paints a picture of a people who are protected from above by a canopy of cloud during the day and of fire at night. This alludes to the wilderness days when the fiery, cloudy, Pillar went before the Children of Israel in the wilderness (March 12). The Pillar was Christ who provided shade, warmth, protection and direction to His people. In today's reading the Pillar is described as a Branch – not a bare branch, but a glorious and beautiful Branch that spreads out over the land providing shade and protection. The Branch is laden with fruit representing the nobility and glory of the remnant who have escaped Babylon.

This scene has not fully played out yet, but in Revelation 12:17 we find, in the last days, a remnant who have overcome Babylon and who "…*keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ".* Who is that remnant? Just as then, it is still those who dwell under the Branch.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving....'" Isaiah 6:8-11.

How would you like to volunteer for a task and then be told that, although you must put your all into it, you will fail completely? You might well ask, "Then what's the point of doing it?" That was young Isaiah's experience as the Assyrians were about to destroy Jerusalem. Even though they would never listen, he was to try and persuade God's hard-nosed and rebellious people to turn back to God before it was too late. The young man might well have objected, but instead he valiantly asked, *"For how long shall I do it, Lord?"* Now there was a volunteer upon whom God could smile.

The seemingly impossible mission given to Isaiah, and the enthusiasm with which he set about it, foreshadowed the Messiah who, seven hundred years later, would willingly – no, eagerly – come from heaven on a mission to save the world from itself. Like Isaiah, Christ would also be rejected and would seal His mission with His life. The futility of Isaiah's role might have led him to give up in despair, but it was imperative that later generations fully understand that God had done everything possible in order to save them. Had Isaiah not drunk this cup to the last drop, Jesus and the apostles could never have quoted the words of today's reading.[38]

This drama is being re-enacted today; this time on a cosmic scale. Not since the days of Noah has there been such a world-wide rejection of belief in the Creator. Not since the days of Noah has there been such a threat to the world's existence. Who will warn the world? Now, more than ever, an Isaiah is needed who will step forward and say, "Here am I. Send me!"

[38] Matthew. 13:14-15; John 12:37–41, Acts 28:26.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14.

This verse has caused much discussion over the centuries. The Hebrew word for virgin also means *young woman*. So Isaiah may have just been saying that a certain young woman, known to both himself and to King Ahaz, will give birth to a son she will call Immanuel, and before he is about three years of age, Ahaz will be delivered from his enemies.

Yet, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek during the 2nd Century BC, the translators, who were not Christians, used a word for virgin that very specifically means a chaste unmarried woman. What did they know about the prophecy that led them to do that? The Apostle Matthew, in 1:23 of his gospel, also used that same Greek word in reference to the Virgin Mary.

Isaiah's prophecies often have double meanings, and this is one of them. God has a custom of presenting truth in such a way that those who seek to explain it away will usually find opportunity to do so. One commentator says of this verse, "there are resemblances to the great Antitype sufficient to be recognised by those who seek them; dissimilarities enough to confound those who do not desire to discover them".[39]

For Ahaz, the sign God gave him of his pending deliverance was that the young woman, maybe his wife, would give birth to a son, and would name him Immanuel. Presumably she was unaware of the prophecy, and Ahaz would have waited with bated breath to see what she would name the lad, for this child meant his salvation. Herein lies the force of the prophecy: for us a Child has been born who will know how to discern good from evil, and will choose the good, and through Him, the land of our enemy, Satan, will be laid waste (v.16). This Child means our salvation.

[39] Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary on Isaiah 7:14.

August 2 **The Light of the World (CD)**

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan— The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. Isaiah 9:1-2.

Matthew's gospel records that when Jesus learned of the imprisonment of John the Baptist, He retreated from Judea and based His ministry out of Capernaum in Galilee, thus fulfilling Isaiah's words above (see Matthew 4:12-17). In Galilee Jesus found acceptance for the simple truths He wished to impart. These humble country folk were not like the city-slickers of Judea who loved the fast life and all that went with it.

The Galileans were greatly blessed by Jesus' presence. It was in Galilee that Jesus performed His first miracle; it was there that He preached the Sermon on the Mount, fed the five thousand, healed the sick and raised the dead. His forays into Jerusalem to observe the required festivals were often times of conflict and trouble, but in the quietness of Galilee's hills, His disciples could learn the skills they would need in order to do the great work for which he was preparing them.

From Galilee shone a great Light that would illuminate the entire world. For Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world"* (John 8:12). Like the rays of the sun flashing through space, bringing light and life in their path, so Light and Life was brought to the world from the radiance that shone from Galilee. As the moon reflects the sun's glory in the night, so Jesus' followers were to reflect His light in every darkened corner of the globe. That Light still shines today, and we are the ones to take it into every nook and cranny where darkness still exists.

August 3 **The Governor (BDH)**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6.

What an amazing promise! There is no doubt this individual is a human being, for He is to be born as a child. Yet He is portrayed in words used to describe God. Who is he? Has He been born yet? Jews believe He is yet to be born; Christians believe He was born in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago, and His name was Jesus.

Jew or Christian, the establishment of this Government is the blessed hope of all who believe. Jesus offended the Jews by claiming to be the subject of these prophecies. He said, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"* (Matthew 28:18). When quizzed on this subject at His trial, He said to Pilate, *"you are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world…"* (John 18:37). With these words He was claiming to have fulfilled the words of today's reading.

The Jews were expecting the Messiah to arrive in style. But they failed to understand the nature of His Government. Their vision was too small. The Messiah did come to Judea to establish His Government, and its first citizens were those who accepted Him as their Governor. He might have established His throne on earth there and then, but His plan was bigger than that. It was for His people to go throughout the whole world sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom until such time as all who will believe have been sealed (Revelation 7:3). That work continues to this day as faithful men and women move within their sphere of influence to share the Good News. Soon the work will be finished, and Jesus will say to them, *'Well done, you good and faithful servants…Come and share your Master's joy* (see Matthew 25:21).

August 4 The Wonderful Counsellor (BDH)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6.

Imagine having a *Curriculum Vitae* like this one! Among the attributes used to describe Him is the detail that He is wonderful, a Wonderful Counsellor. We tend to use the word 'wonderful' rather lightly today, perhaps as in describing an ice-cream flavour. The word really signifies a deep sense of awe at something mind-boggling. When the disciples performed their first miracle, it was to heal a man whom everybody knew had been unable to walk since birth. When the people saw him leaping and praising God, they were, "*filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him"* (Acts 3:10 KJV). Wonder and amazement is how we will view this Child when we know Him.

The child will be a Counsellor, a Mentor such as the world has never before seen. For He has sat in the counsels of heaven from eternity, Isaiah writes of Him, "*O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth"* (Isaiah 25:1 KJV).

Some Bible versions use the word 'counsellor' to translate Jesus' famous promise of John 14:16 "*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Counsellor, that he may abide with you forever"*[40]*.* In verse 26 of this chapter, Jesus adds, "*But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you".* In these words Jesus again makes an astounding claim: not only is He the Wonderful Counsellor, but that He and His counsel will remain with the world, in the form of the Holy Spirit, after He has returned to the Father (see John 16:7-11). Now this is deep stuff.

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[40] The word used by Jesus here is notoriously difficult to translate into English. The word He used was 'paracletos' which is variously translated as advocate, helper, comforter, counsellor, or paraclete. In John 16:8, Jesus gives His job description, which is to *Convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*

August 5 **The Mighty God (BD)**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6.

The Hebrew expression used for 'Mighty God' in this verse is found only three times in the Bible. Both the two other times, Isaiah 10:21 and Jeremiah 32:18 refer to the Mighty God as being Jehovah. In other words, the child to be given is none other than Jehovah Himself. This is not the first time we have run across this great truth; Jesus is same Person as Jehovah. Jehovah was His name in heaven prior to His becoming a man.

Did He become Jehovah again after the Ascension? Yes and no. Yes, because Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 106:48); no, because when He took on humanity it was forever. Prior to the incarnation He was Spirit; following the incarnation He is Flesh. After His resurrection He did not revert to Spirit, but was raised from death with the body that He now has (see Luke 24:36-43). At His resurrection He became the Firstfruits of all who will be raised to life at the last day. He could have ascended to heaven as Spirit, but He has chosen to identify Himself physically with the mankind He came to save so that forevermore He will appear as a man. When He arose from Joseph of Aramathea's tomb on the day of the Feast of the Firstfruits, it was with a new body, one that does not grow old and die, but one that will remain forever. On the outside, the new body still resembles the old, but on the inside it is flesh and bone that does not age. On that day the perishable became imperishable, and the mortal became immortal (1Corinthians 15:53). So, at His coming, His people will be raised from death, or changed if yet alive, to be made like Him; He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21). He has the power to do that for He is the Mighty God.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6.

So how can the Messiah, the One Christians believe is God the Son, also be called The Everlasting Father? Jews, ancient and modern, do not talk of God in terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but they do use a plural word for God, *Elohim,* as in *"And God [Elohim] said, 'Let us make man in our image'"*. That word 'our' is not *the royal we*, which monarchs have traditionally used in place of the first person, as in Queen Victoria's "We are not amused", but it is translated that way because the suffix *–im* is the Hebrew way to pluralise a masculine noun.

In Psalm 89:26 God calls Himself David's Father, possibly because David was to be the first king in a royal line that would extend to the Messiah's everlasting reign. A few chapters hence, Isaiah will write of God*, "...I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah…and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah"* (22:20-21). We will see, on August 13, why Eliakim is a Christ-type who will be Father to the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem.

Therefore, Jesus was not altogether inventing a new concept when he said to his distraught parents, *"Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?",* and when He taught us to pray, *"Our Father who art in heaven".*

From Isaiah's perspective, the child to be born would be Everlasting Father in the sense that He would be the spiritual Father of all who believe. Just as Isaac was a child of promise who became earthly father to God's people (Romans 9:6-13), so Jesus is the Child of Promise who would become spiritual Father to God's people.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6.

Men talk much of peace, but seldom achieve it. Even when peace is realised, it is usually only the absence of war. This Child is to be called *The Prince of Peace*. Will His peace be simply the absence of war? The story is told of an artist who portrayed peace as a chick safely in its nest while a storm raged all around it. True peace must be more than the absence of storm. The chick was at peace because it was sheltered by its mother. Safe and dry under its mother's wing, the chick need not even have been aware of the storm. That is the kind of peace we seek amid the storms of life.

If ever Jesus contradicted Himself it was over the subject of peace. *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth",* He said, *"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"* (Matthew 10:34). Yet He also said to His disciples, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you..."* (John 14:27). So the Prince of Peace does not promise there will be no strife, conflict and storm in our lives. Rather, He offers us the quiet assurance that whatever may come upon us, He is there to shelter us. Paul called this the peace of God which transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Horatio Spafford must have experienced this peace in 1871 when, after he lost his four daughters in a tragedy at sea, he was able to pen the words of a hymn that has been an inspiration to countless men and women since that time.

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to *know*,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.[41]

[41] It Is Well With My Soul, Horatio Spafford, 1876. Music by Philip Bliss, original wording.

August 8 Justice and Righteousness (D)

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:7.

When we looked at Jacob's audacious prophecy of Genesis 49:10, we discovered that it was fulfilled perfectly: the descendants of his son Judah were rulers in Israel from the time of David until AD6 when Caesar placed the Roman governor Coponius over Judea. Even during the days of exile and occupation they still had limited self-government under the protection of godly Jews such as Daniel and Esther. It was not until AD70 that the sceptre finally and irrevocably departed. But by that time 'He to whom it belonged' had come.

Our text today promises that the Child, when He comes to David's throne, will reign with justice and righteousness for all time. It is not surprising therefore to read these words concerning King David: "*So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people"* (2Samuel 8:15 NKJV). Even though several kings in this dynasty 'did what was right in the sight of the Lord', only David and Christ, the first and the Last, are described as ruling with justice over all the people.

Imagine for a minute what would have happened in Israel had all Israel's kings followed David's example. What a glorious dynasty it would have been. What blessings it would have brought to the world. Each generation would have been more blessed than the one before it until it culminated in the reign of Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords forever.

August 9 **The Nazarene (CD)**

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. Isaiah 11:1-3.

Isaiah compares Israel with Assyria, whose branches God will bring down with such power that no new shoots will ever grow again (Isaiah 10:33). Israel, on the other hand, will produce a new shoot that will grow into a mighty Branch upon which the Spirit of God will dwell.

A branch is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to signify the Messiah, but never using the Hebrew word used here. In fact, not one of the three other uses of this word refers to the Messiah. If Isaiah had not written that this Branch would come from the stump of Jesse, the passage would not be significant. It can't refer to David because David had been dead for centuries by the time of this writing.

But now one strange assertion by Matthew: "*and* [Jesus] *went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets 'He will be called a Nazarene'"* (Matthew 2:23). The word Isaiah used to describe this branch is *Netser.* According to some Bible commentaries [42], Nazareth was named after a bandit leader named Ben Netser who had used the region as a base for his illegal operations. Thus, its inhabitants were known as *Netserenes*, or in Greek, Nazarenes. Was Matthew, therefore, making a play on words? Was he referring to a different prophecy? Why did he write 'prophets', plural, instead of using the singular? These questions have always puzzled Bible students; suggestions are aplenty, but definitive answers are not forthcoming. We must stick with fact; and this is that as Israel faced destruction, Isaiah was prophesying that one day One would come from the House of David upon whom the Spirit of God would rest. There has ever been only one contender for that: the One over whom the dove hovered, Jesus the Nazarene.

[42] See Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible on Isaiah 11:1.

August 10 **The Just Judge (CD)**

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; Isaiah 11:1-3.

We first read of The Branch in Isaiah 4:2, "*In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious…"* Undoubtedly the young Jesus, during His Nazareth days, would ponder these words as He contemplated His future ministry. In fact today's passage reads almost as a job description for a ruler. What kind of world would we live in if every world leader made these words his or her standard of government?

There are seven Spirits listed in this passage: The Spirit of the Lord, of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of power, of knowledge, and of fear of the Lord. In the book of Revelation there are several references to the seven Spirits (1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6), and to whom do they refer? They describe Jesus; He is the One in whom the seven Spirits dwell.

Not just as King of kings, but as a poor Palestinian pedestrian, Jesus was a man who judged not by what He saw with His eyes, or heard with His ears. Nowhere better was this illustrated than on the day the rulers brought to Him a woman caught in adultery – "caught in the very act", they said. It was a trick of course; if He condemned her, they would accuse Him to the Romans, if He acquitted her, they would accuse Him of breaking the Law of Moses. A win-win situation they thought. But they did not reckon with the Seven Spirits. Without saying a word, Jesus stooped and began to write in the dust. What He wrote was understood only by those who read it, and when they read it they quietly slunk away.

But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. Isaiah 11:4-5.

In these verses the contrast is not between the good and the bad, or between the rich and the poor; rather it is between the poor and the wicked. The wicked are struck down and destroyed while the poor and needy are judged with righteousness and justice. The Seed of Jesse will be a Ruler whose sympathies always go out to the oppressed and downtrodden, to those who have no power or control over their life's situation.

It does not come naturally to a man to rule in this manner; there are always pressures and incentives to favour those who can offer something in return. Injustice is endemic among our ruling classes, and the situation is exacerbated by the Social Darwinian concept of 'survival of the fittest'; the poor are poor because they are weaker, and the weaker must give way to the stronger.

Another evidence for the Messiahship of Jesus is His compassion on just this class of people. The lower down the status ladder a person was, the more Jesus identified with them. Had Jesus lived in India, it would have been the 'Untouchables' that drew His empathy; in Africa, the refugees of war, the child soldiers; in 19th Century America, the slaves; in the wealthy West, the homeless, the addict, the trafficked.

It is no surprise then, that when Jesus comes to judge the world, it is how we treat others that will be His measuring rod. He will identify so closely with the underdog that He will say to us, "Whatever you did for or against them, you did for or against me" (see Matthew 25:31-46).

August 12 **The Banner (D)**

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. Isaiah 11:10 KJV.

When the Israelites were encamped in the wilderness, the tribes were arranged in order around the tabernacle, which was at the centre of the encampment. Each tribe had a flag hoisted in a prominent location bearing the insignia of the tribe. When the root of Jesse established His kingdom on earth He also bore a flag – not a literal one, but nevertheless one that would be seen by the whole world. Just as an Israelite knew where his tent was by looking at the flag, so we look to the flag in order to know where is our spiritual dwelling.

What is the insignia on our flag? One of the most meaningful national flags is that of India: with a spinning wheel at its centre. Why a spinning wheel? Because it signified *homespun;* by refusing to buy cloth from Britain, and instead spinning their own, the people broke free from their dependence on their colonial master. The spinning wheel stood for freedom.

But what is the Christian's ensign? Most would accept that it is the Cross, for Jesus has instructed us to take up our cross and to follow Him (Matthew 16:24). Normally however, we do not follow bearing the flag, we lead bearing the flag. Therefore, if we are following Christ, bearing our cross, what ensign, or banner, does He carry? On the day the wilderness Israelites fought their first battle they found that they prevailed only while Moses bore his staff above his head (see March 19). With the help of Aaron and and Hur he was able to hold his arms up all day so that Joshua and his men could gain the victory. After the battle Moses set up an altar and named it *"Jehovah Nissi",* The Lord is my banner. God is Love, so we may say with the lovesick young Shulemite, "His banner over me is Love" (Song of Solomon 2:4,5).

August 13. The Gatekeeper (E)

In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. Isaiah 22:20-22.

The context for Isaiah 22 is Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701BC. The passage refers to one Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who was the gatekeeper in Jerusalem. He wore a special robe and sash, and carried the keys to the city. No one could enter the city except through Eliakim. Being under siege, it is essential to be able to enter the city in order to take refuge behind its wall. The best place in a siege is definitely inside the city, not outside. Entry into Jerusalem meant life. To be unable to enter meant death. It was Eliakim who had the power to save or not to save. People might have said, "There is only one name in Jerusalem through whom we can be saved, the name of Eliakim, son of Hilkiah".

Sounds familiar doesn't it? Speaking of Jesus, the Apostle Peter said, "*…there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Therefore it is interesting to read in the book of Revelation that Jesus also wears a special robe and sash (Revelation 1:13), and also carries the keys to the city of David, that "*What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open"* (Rev 3:7).

Jesus has the keys to the New Jerusalem. But there will come a time when He will throw them away. For when the Enemy is vanquished there will be no further need of them. He has promised that, "*On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there... Nothing impure will ever enter it…but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Revelation 21:25-27).

August 14 The Resurrection And The Life (BG)

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. Isa. 26:19.

It is strange how we have such confused ideas about life after death when passages such as today's are so abundant and so clear. If we follow Isaiah's guide for Bible study found in 28:9-10, we can spread out all the related passages before us like a jigsaw, and gain an accurate picture of this subject which is of so much interest to humanity[43].

This is not a Messianic passage, but it has much to say about the power of the Messiah. As Job put it, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God"* (Job 19:25). When Messiah comes He will have power to raise to life all those who have slept in the dust. No matter whether a day or a thousand years, none whose resting place has been marked will be overlooked.

Jesus said in a prayer to His heavenly Father*, "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him"* (John 17:2). By then He had already used this power on several occasions. It had been impossible for the tender-hearted Son of man to listen to the agony of a grieving parent without using it. It is hard, when you have power, not to use it.

"I am the resurrection and the life" said Jesus to another grieving woman. This was no idle promise; for He then proceeded to the tomb where lay a man who had been dead four days – too long for anyone to say the man was not dead. Then with the power and authority of all heaven in Him, He commanded the dead to come forth. There will come another day when He will again give that command to all who dwell in the dust, and again the earth will give birth to her dead.

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[43] See the following passages: Job 19:25-27; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2, 13; Matthew 24:31; John 5:24-29, 11:25; Acts 24:15; 1Corinthians 15:1-55; Philippians 3:21; 1Thessalonians 4:14-16; Revelation 20:4-10.

August 15 **The Cornerstone (BDE)**

*See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line…*Isaiah 28:16-17.

A cornerstone is essential for the strength and line of a building. The Messiah is to be the Cornerstone of Zion. He sets the line, so to speak, for God's people who are interlocked with Him in such a way that they cannot be moved. He bears their weight so that the house becomes one immovable structure that neither hail, nor flood, nor heat, nor cold can wear down.

A tradition in Israel says that when laying the foundation for Solomon's temple, a stone rejected as unsuitable for use in the construction turned out to be perfect for the cornerstone. Psalm 118:22-23 refers to such an event, saying: "*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone".*

To those seeking to destroy Him, Jesus told a parable of some corrupt tenant farmers who schemed to kill the landowner's son and heir, and appropriate the land for themselves. By this parable, Jesus made it plain that He perfectly understood His hearer's designs. He even led them to condemn themselves by asking them what the landowner would do to these farmers. *"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."* (Matthew 21:41). Then the penny dropped that they had just condemned themselves. God is the Landowner, and He, Jesus, is the Son and Heir. Now He spoke plainly; referring to Psalm 118, He said, *"He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed"* (v.44). The cornerstone is able to bear whatever weight is placed upon it. Nothing can remove it out of its place. But if it falls on you, then that is another thing.

August 16 **His Strange Work (DG)**

The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon— to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task. Isaiah 28:21.

Perazim and Gibeon were battle sites at which King David thoroughly routed the Philistines. As David well understood, it was God that gave him the victories (1Chronicles14). Contrary to popular opinion, God is not bloodthirsty; He intervenes in wrath only after all other means have failed. In the days of Abraham He gave the idolatrous Amorites a further 400 years of existence because, He said, *"Their iniquity is not yet full"* (Genesis 15:16). To Ezekiel God said, *"...I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live..."* (Ezekiel 33:11). For this reason when God does finally act it is something alien to the nature of a loving God; it is His strange work. It is not the work of a vengeful god who enjoys inflicting pain; it is the work of a loving Father who sees the need to discipline His children whom He loves.

"But what of all the innocents who suffer too?" The answer to that question lies in the understanding of two themes that run through the entire Bible, but can be overlooked in the detail. The first theme is the conflict between good and evil waged behind heaven's curtains. It is Satan, not God, who is the author of evil. The Bible is the story of how God must deal with that evil. As for the suffering of the innocents, God records it all for the day when all wrongs will be made right.

The second theme is God's abhorrence of sin. Sin cost heaven the life of Messiah. Sin is the transgression of God's Law (1John 3:4). Yet while He loves us dearly, the things we do to one another break His righteous heart. There must come a day when He brings it all to an end. In the light of that, Maybe His strange task is not so strange after all.

Your eyes will see the King in his beauty: they will see the land that is very far off…a place of broad rivers and streams; in which no galley with oars will sail, nor majestic ships pass by. Isaiah 33:17-21 NKJV.

Form this point on, Isaiah's attention turns more and more to the coming kingdom of God. His writing seems, at least until Chapter 53, to assume that Israel will return fully to God and remain that way so that the Messiah, when He comes, will reign as King for all time. Of course there is always conditionality in God's promises, and sadly, the people were not faithful; the Messiah, when He came, did not establish the Kingdom in all its fullness. That will be for another day.

Many of us, when imagining how it will be to live in the 'land that is very far off' think of the peace and beauty of the setting; we picture holiness and happiness and a life free of sin. This is a legitimate longing. But is there not one desire greater than all those wonders? Is it not to behold the King? A song says:

> I dreamed of a city called Glory, So bright and so fair.
> When I entered the gates I cried, "Holy"; The angels all met me there.
> They carried me from mansion to mansion, And oh the sights I did see,
> But I said, "I want to see Jesus, The One who died for me."[44]

In that fair land will be broad rivers that flow serenely through majestic panoramas. No foreign navy will disturb their tranquil waters. Its inhabitants will dwell in peace and safety, and nothing shall disturb their happiness. Yet, it is not the serenity, the tranquillity, the majesty that really counts. Even as the flock of sheep thrives in the lush valley, it is the presence of the shepherd that really matters.

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[44] I Bowed On My Knees and Cried Holy, Nettie Dudley Washington, music by: E. M. Dudley Cantwell. 1923.

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us. Isaiah 33:22.

We keep returning to this idea of the Lord as everything. In the temple He is the Rock, the Cornerstone, the Sacrifice, the Priest, the Bread, the Light. In the field He is the Shepherd, the Lamb, the Gate to the sheepfold. Now He is the Maker of the Law, the King who enforces the Law, and the Judge who acquits or condemns the accused. In 1John 2:1 we find Him also to be the Advocate who approaches the bar in the defence of the penitent lawbreaker.

Now this is some legal system. How many of us, if brought to trial, would fear the outcome if our defence lawyer was also our judge? One might answer that question by saying that it depends upon how strong or how clever the prosecution is. But heaven's legal system works a little differently. The trial is not to determine our guilt or innocence; our guilt is understood, for not one of us is without sin (Romans 3:23, 5:12). The trial is to determine whether or not we have accepted the pardon offered. That pardon is offered to all is the essence of the Gospel.

But on what legal grounds can pardon be offered? Why should the guilty go free? Is that justice? The Scriptures are very plain that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22). Back in April we looked at the fascinating story of the woman of Tekoa. From that story we learned that in Hebrew law the king could not forgive a crime without acquiring the guilt of the criminal. In other words if a king were to forgive, or a judge were to acquit, he must bear the responsibility for the crime. Therefore, when God offers remission of our sins, He must take the guilt – and the punishment – required by the law. And that is exactly what He did; He shed His own blood that we might go free, and by doing so acted fully within His own law.

No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill"; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven. Isaiah 33:24

One of the most impressive things about the earthly ministry of Jesus is that during the time he lived among men, His work, and indeed His great joy, when visiting a community, was to leave that population completely free of sickness. Imagine what excitement and anticipation must have existed in a village when it was heard that Jesus was coming there. No sick person in their right mind would fail to make sure they were as close as possible to Him. By the time He left there was not a sick or handicapped person in the community. Not only healed, but forgiven.

Today's reading links the promise of healing with that of the forgiveness of sin. How do healing and forgiveness go hand in hand? On one occasion Jesus was faced with a wretched case, that of a man whose life choices had left him so completely debilitated that he was unable to do anything for himself. A curious crowd surrounded the two men as they looked at each other, shameful despair on the face of one, and tender compassion on that of the other. As Jesus looked into the tortured eyes of the wretch before Him, He understood fully what the man really wanted. The plea in the man's eyes sought not just to be able to walk again, but to know that he was accepted by God; that he was forgiven for the life that had led him into this pitiful state. *"Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven"* were the words that fell on the ears of the wretch. Then to those critics who were present Jesus said, *"Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home* (Matthew 9:1-8). Jesus came to establish the kingdom of heaven. In that kingdom there is no sickness; in that kingdom there is no sin.

August 20 **One Big Picture (DG)**

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. Isaiah 35:1-2.

There is a tendency to categorise the many and varied Old Testament references to the Messiah into those that concern His first advent, and those that concern His second. In fact it is probably better to view all the scenes in the drama of God's plan of salvation as one big picture. From the day He first provided skins to cover man's nakedness until the day He exchanges them for the white robes of Revelation, God's labour on our behalf is really one grand work. In revealing His plan to us through the Bible, God must use words that are comprehensible to people of all eras and cultures so that all who put their trust in Him, from righteous Abel to the last one to be sealed in the forehead (Revelation 7:3), will have the same blessed hope, even though they may understand it from different perspectives.

Not only that, but because God has given us the power of choice, He included the contingency that we would not follow the plan He has so lovingly laid out for us. It was not His intention that Adam eat that fruit, it was not His intention that the sons of God intermarry with the sons of men (Genesis 6:2), it was not His intention that the Israelites choose to disobey His laws and so be taken into captivity (Deuteronomy 28). At every turn we have frustrated His plans for our good.

In spite of all our wrong choices, the plan is still there. Isaiah 35 is a sublime poem of promise that pictures the world we would live in had we made correct choices. Yet the promise still stands; the day will come when the land will shout for joy because it sees the glory of the Lord.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Isaiah 35:3-4.

Here is an aspect of the Day of the Lord that we do not often consider; it concerns our relationship to others during that time, especially those who we might see as 'weaker brethren'. It takes some strength of character to stand for the Scriptures in a day and age when to do so is seen to be weak-mindedness. Such individuality does not lend itself easily to tolerance for those with feeble hands, weak knees, and fearful hearts. Yet, Jesus came to earth to show us how we should be toward others so that as He was to them, so should we be to them.

In the last days, we are told, men's hearts will fail from fear because of what is happening to the world (Luke 21:26). This clearly refers to unbelievers, but may also include those who know the Lord, but, being fearful by nature, are overly anxious about the events they know they must pass through. We are enjoined not to exploit peoples' fears, but to show empathy through well-chosen words. Today's reading paints a beautiful word picture which reveals to us how to encourage others, and how to be as Jesus was.

There is a parallel to this passage in the New Testament; after describing the events taking place at the return of Christ, the Apostle Paul concludes his instruction with these words: *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up* (1Thessalonians 5:11). The Word of God is given to us, not to take advantage of other's fears, but to provide a faith advantage that enables us to strengthen others. Here is no smugness or self awareness, here is no patronising, just the simple instruction to say to them, "*Be strong, do not fear; your God will come… he will come to save you*."

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Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool…In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. Isaiah 35:5-7.

As mentioned previously, it is not necessary to separate the two sets of imagery here. The Messiah fulfilled the promise of the first two sentences during His earthly ministry, and will complete the work when He makes all things new (Revelation 21:5). It's really all a part of the same process.

John the Baptist had understood from Malachi's prophecy concerning himself (Malachi 4), that when the Messiah should come He would execute fiery vengeance on God's, and Israel's, enemies. So when he found himself languishing in prison, and saw Jesus making no effort to drive out the Romans, he was deeply discouraged. Was this man not the Anointed One after all? So he sent his friends to Jesus with the question, "Are you the one to come, or shall we look for another?"

Jesus did not immediately respond to the question, but continued to do exactly what He had been doing when they found Him; that is, opening scaled eyes, unblocking stopped ears, straightening twisted limbs, and loosening frozen tongues. Then Jesus turned to John's disciples and said, *"Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard…Happy is he who is not offended in me"* (Luke 7:22-23). With these words Jesus was referring to the first part of our reading for today. He was reminding John that Isaiah 35 is as much the work of the Messiah as Malachi 4. There is a season and a time for everything under the sun. Now is the day to relieve suffering, tomorrow will be the day to remove jackals

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··· *and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.* Isaiah 35:10.

The historical setting for this is the Babylonian captivity where a chastened and wiser people dreamed longingly of the day they would once again enter their homeland of Zion.

Yet the imagery goes deeper than that, for it also brings to mind the final week of the sacrificial calendar in which, after the day of Atonement when the Israelites were symbolically cleansed of their sins, they would joyfully proceed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. As families and friends made their way together down the dusty roads, they would sing psalms of praise such as Psalm 121 and 122:

> *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem* (Psalm 122:1-2).

In the context of Isaiah 35, there is a further significance to these words, for the day will soon come when the Lord Jesus Himself will lead His ransomed into the gates of the Holy City. On that day everlasting joy will crown their heads, and they shall sing songs of joy and praise, for the battle is over and the victory won. Then they will hear a voice from the throne saying; *"now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Rev 21:3-4). Then there shall be *"Peace within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces"* (Psalm 122:7).

August 24 **The Stumblingblock (CD)**

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3.

Whenever the word *LORD* is written in capitals it is the name of God, the Hebrew letters YHWH. As ancient Hebrew was written without vowels, it is not easy to know exactly how the name was pronounced, and furthermore, devout Jews would not pronounce it; they would simply use *adonai,* Lord.

When John the Baptist went out to prepare the world for the arrival of Messiah, he said, "*This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord…'"* (Matthew 3:3). In other words, John was stating categorically that it was Jesus who was YHWH. The One who had created the earth, who had given life to man, who had said to Moses, "I am who I am", and who had given the Law on Mount Sinai, was the same One who trod the dusty paths of Palestine. This is a profound thought, and difficult for some to accept. The Jews were scandalised by the idea that their glorious Messiah could be treated so shamefully, therefore this One could not be the Messiah. Gentiles, on the other hand, under the influence of the Greek worldview, considered themselves too progressive to accept such an idea. For those reasons the Apostle Paul wrote *"…but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles"* (1Corinthians 1:23).

It is no different today. In all eras, it seems, the Bible cannot be believed without faith. Yes, it takes faith to accept the Gospel because it does not follow human logic – men cannot put God to death, nor does it follow conventional wisdom – it cannot be empirically tested. It's almost as though God wants it to be difficult to believe. Obviously He is looking for a quality in heaven's citizens that goes beyond believing only what one sees, and trusting only what can be proved.

August 25 **Rough Places Plain (CDH)**

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Isaiah 40:4-5.

When a king was to visit a community, the people would go out and prepare the way for him by levelling the road and removing any obstacles from his intended path. Matthew quoted only verse 3, but Luke also quoted today's reading in John the Baptist's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. Yet we did not see today's words fulfilled in the earthly ministry of Jesus unless they are seen in His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. On that day the people thought Jesus had come to sit on David's throne as the true king of Israel. They would have levelled the road for Him had it been necessary. But they were wrong – by week's end Jesus hung dead upon a cross.

Was Luke wrong to include these verses in his Gospel? Not at all. The words apply first to the Gospel message which Christ was to preach so that "high and proud thoughts may be brought down, good desires planted, crooked and rugged tempers made straight and softened, and every hindrance removed".[45] Starting in Galilee, like a grain of mustard seed, the Gospel was to grow under the husbandry of faithful disciples, increasing by the Spirit of God, until "*all mankind together will see it"*.

The words of today have another application: they look to the day when all good soil has been sowed and all increase is given. Then the Gospel has completed its work and Christ shall return in glory and great power. On that day the mountains shall tumble and valleys be filled, and the glory of the Lord Jesus will be revealed, and all mankind will see Him. The mouth of the Lord has spoken it, and it must happen.

[45] Matthew Henry Commentary on Isaiah 40:1-11.

August 26 **The Shepherd's Rod**

See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40:10-11.

A popular artwork shows the Good Shepherd leading His flock safely through a ravine, a lamb comfortably over his shoulders, while its mother walks trustingly beside Him, the flock following close behind. The shepherd motif keeps recurring in Scripture because it is the most perfect analogy of the relationship between God and man. Only a trusted shepherd will sheep follow so confidently, "*And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers."* John 10:5 (KJV).

Yet today's passage is not only about green pastures and still waters; it is also about power and rulership. Why are these two images side by side? Perhaps because the shepherd has a more diverse job description than gently leading the sheep to safe pastures; there is still the rod. The rod is a heavy stick, about two feet (60 cm) long with a knob at one end, often known as a knobkerrie. This implement serves as the shepherd's principle weapon of defence against predators, snakes and other unwelcome guests. It has another function too: Philip Keller tells of his experience in East Africa observing shepherd boys who with uncanny accuracy would frequently "hurl their knobkerrie at some recalcitrant beast that misbehaved. If the shepherd saw a sheep getting too close to danger, the club would go whistling through the air to send the wayward animal scurrying back to the bunch", he writes. [46]

It seems then that protection, discipline, and reward go hand in hand. Only with discipline can the Good Shepherd safely lead His flock to the green pastures that are its reward.

[46] Phillip Keller, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, Zondervan, 1970, p95.

August 27 **The Redeemer (GH)**

Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you," declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 41:14.

This passage is just one of about seventeen in which God calls himself Israel's Redeemer. In the Hebrew world the kinsman redeemer was an integral part of daily life; he was a blood relative who played a fourfold role in:

1) Redeeming land sold by a relative in hard times,
2) Redeeming a relative sold into slavery to pay a debt.
3) Taking as wife the widow of a brother who has died without an heir so that the deceased brother would have an heir.
4) Avenging the murder of a relative.

Jews believe that the Messiah, when he comes, will restore the land of Israel to them; will bring freedom from oppression and occupation; and will bring vengeance upon Israel's enemies. Christians believe these roles are all fulfilled by Jesus Christ, not only in terms of Israel, but of the whole world, spiritual Israel. Did Jesus fulfil all four roles? Let's see:

1). Adam effectively sold the earth to Satan for the price of 'becoming like God'. But by His sacrifice Christ, the second Adam, has restored the ownership of the earth back to His brother (Romans 5:14-19).
2). We have all been sold into the slavery of sin, but through Calvary we are set free and adopted as sons of God and heirs of the kingdom (Galatians 4:1-7).
3). Just as Boaz redeemed Ruth, so Christ has betrothed Himself to the church which is now His glorious bride redeemed (Ephesians 5:31-32; Rev. 19:7-9).
4). Satan is the father of all murderers, and the hour will come when Christ will execute justice upon him for all the suffering and injustice he has brought upon the world (Isaiah 59:16-20, Romans 12:19).

> *...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works* (Titus 2:13-14)

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. Isaiah 42:1.

The first four verses of Isaiah 42 present the Messiah as a faithful Servant, One with a unique work to do: to bring knowledge of God, not just to Israel, but to all nations. Not just information, but a saving knowledge (1Corinthians 2:9-10).

The words of today's text are very similar to those spoken by God on the day that Jesus emerged from the waters of baptism, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). In fact God could have used them with equal effect. Certainly Isaiah's words were fulfilled on the day of the Messiah's anointing.

For such a highly anticipated event, the anointing of God's servant was a remarkably low-key affair. King Solomon's anointing was a far more spectacular event than Christ's. But then the anointing of kings was given more weight than the anointing of prophets, and Jesus was anointed as The Prophet, not The King – that will come later. Of the Messiah's anointing Hosea wrote, *"His going forth is prepared as the morning"* (Hosea 6:3 KJV). Just as the sun rises quietly and gently to bring light and life to the world, so the Servant was to arise without ostentation to bring light to a world in darkness.

The Servant spent his early life in the obscurity of a Galilean village earning His living as a tradesman. When not working He was immersed in the Word of God, so that the law and the prophets became the building blocks of His character. As He communed with His heavenly Father His mission was made clear to Him so that when the time was fully come, when the sixty-nine weeks of Daniel were complete, and Elijah the prophet again walked the land, the Servant set forth on behalf of His Master.

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Isaiah 42:2-3.

After six weeks the Servant emerged victorious from the desert following a struggle we know little about. He had brought to nothing the Enemy's claim that the law of God was unjust because it could not be kept. The Servant had overcome appetite, presumption, and lust; now He could go into the land fully qualified to be the Redeemer of man.

If I were to overcome those three sins, I would become guilty of another: pride. But not so the Servant. In order for His mission to succeed He would not go out into the city streets to draw attention to Himself. Rather He would, like the sun modestly arising in the morning, quietly go about His work with dignity and love bringing healing and hope to a broken world. His work was not to condemn, but to forgive; not to neglect, but to nurture; not to humiliate, but to hearten.

There are many bruised reeds in the world today, many a smouldering wick on the verge of being snuffed out. The Servant is no longer with us in person, but His Spirit still guides those who follow in His steps. *"Therefore go*", He tells us, *"and make disciples of all nations…and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is not as easy as we think to be the kind of person Jesus was. We are prone to judge others rather than befriend them. We have great trouble loving the unlovable and accepting those who intimidate us. We need to learn what it really means to love others because perfect love casts out fear (1John 4:18). Only when we come to love as the Servant loved will we do His work as He did it.

August 30 **The Diplomat (D)**

*He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice….*Isaiah 42:2-3.

The Gospels tell of an incident in which Jesus seriously offended the religious authorities by healing a man's damaged hand on the Sabbath day. To these men healing was work which was not permissible on the Sabbath, and so they laid plans to put Jesus to death. When He heard of it, Jesus, not wanting open conflict, quietly retired from the region cautioning those healed not to mention the matter. This discretion on the Jesus' part led Matthew to note that the Saviour was fulfilling Isaiah's words of today's text (see Matthew 12:19).

There were several occasions in which Jesus instructed people to say nothing about the fact that He had healed them. It was not for fear of the authorities that He acted this way, but in order to protect His ministry. Behind all the details of His day-to-day toil lay the grand objective to redeem humankind and to restore us to God's image; Jesus could allow nothing to interfere with that. Satan sought every opportunity to obstruct the plan of salvation, and the best way to do that was to bring about Jesus' early death. In order for Christ to redeem us it was necessary for Him to die as the Antitype of prophecy - at the time and in the manner spoken of by the prophets - a sacrificial death and not a back-alley murder.

In the case of the damaged hand, the priests were fully aware of the miracle because it was done in their sight. Their envy consequently led them to devise the plot to kill Jesus, which, if it had taken place, would have had far-reaching consequences for us. Thus Jesus quietly retreated to a less prickly region to continue His work, and again to repeat the familiar, but soon forgotten, caveat to "tell no man".

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope. Isaiah 42:4

Have you ever wondered what it must have been like for Jesus, a Man of such acumen, wisdom and vision, to be so limited in what He could share with His followers? While His mind had become elevated to distant heights through the illumination of the Scriptures and communion with His heavenly Father, the disciples' interests remained on who among them would be greatest in the kingdom. Once He said to them*, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear"* (John 16:12). In fact there was only one person who seemed to have any inkling of the deep things of the mystery of the kingdom (Mark 4:11), and that was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. While her sister fussed in the kitchen, Mary sat at Jesus' feet soaking in the words of her Master. I'm sure He was able to open her mind to truths for which the disciples were nowhere near ready. Surely it was not unknowingly that she anointed Jesus' feet with costly oil shortly before His death. She alone seemed to have recognised that something big was going on.

Satan seeks to keep mankind in darkness as to the things of God. Too often we are comfortable in that darkness, afraid of the cost of all that heavenly wisdom God longs to impart to us through Bible study and prayer. But we too can sit at the feet of Jesus, and if we take the time to do so, He will take the time to teach us.

Jesus was not discouraged at the disciples' lack of spiritual insight, for He knew that one day, through them, justice would prevail throughout the world, and His law would become the foundation of human culture. We have not reached that point yet, but the promise is sure, and Isaiah's words will surely come to pass.

September 1 **The Light (DH)**

This is what God the LORD says… "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. Isaiah 42:5-7.

Who is the Lord talking to here? Is it Israel? Had they followed God's will and lived up to His vision, they would certainly have been a great blessing to the world. God always intended, and still intends, that His followers reflect His light to those in darkness. It is commonly heard from critics of Christian mission that missionaries have done more harm than good. Maybe, in some cases they have, but the millions they have brought out of darkness will never cease to thank them.

It had been God's plan from the beginning that the world be a home of great light, wisdom, and nobility for all human beings. But those gifts would not come naturally; they would come as faithful people shared the light God had given them so that *"the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (Isaiah 11:9).

We have never been as faithful as God intended in reflecting His light to the world. It happened briefly in King David's day, and in the days of Solomon, his son. But since then it seems the darkness has grown greater with each passing generation. Something had to be done. And it was - Messiah came. He came not to judge, but to shed light once again on a world of darkness. Today's passage describes in sublime language the work of Jesus. It is Jesus who is being spoken to in this verse. What might have been the future of the planet if He had not come? Now He asks us to continue to reflect His light in every part of the world.

September 2 **The Holy One (AH)**

This is what the LORD says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride. I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King. Isaiah 43:14-15.

Thirty-one times in the Hebrew Scriptures God calls Himself, or is called, the Holy One. Therefore, it is most interesting that a demon should cry out through the mouth of the man it has possessed, *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"* (Mark 1:24). For the demon, or 'unclean spirit' as Mark calls it, to call Jesus the Holy One tells us that it knew something the people did not know. The possessed man was not speaking for himself, for Jesus would have been a stranger to him, it was the demon who was speaking, and it knew exactly who had come to Capernaum that day.

What is an unclean spirit? How did it know who Jesus was? While it doesn't specifically state it, the Bible suggests that unclean sprits, also called demons, devils and evil spirits, are angels who joined Lucifer's rebellion against heaven.[47] As do people in many non-western cultures today, the people of Israel could easily recognise the presence of an unclean spirit, as opposed to mental illness. For that reason Matthew can write that Jesus healed the demon-possessed and those having seizures (4:24). It is natural that the demon would know exactly who Jesus was for it had once sang His praises in the courts of heaven. The demons fully understand the deity of Christ; therefore it is beyond comprehension that they should have allowed themselves to be led astray during the rebellion. There is a lesson for us in that: even in the very presence of the Holy One it is possible to turn away. His love has given us that option. Let us pray that we don't.
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[47] (see Job 1:6, 7; Isaiah 12:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-15). Jesus Himself said, *Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels* (Matthew 25:41). The word Peter uses for hell is *tartaros*, and is used only in reference to a place for demons to inhabit while they wait for their final destruction. This probably explains why the demoniac asked Jesus if He had come to destroy them (Mark 1:24). The 'hell' humans go to is the word *hades* which simply means 'grave'.

September 3 **The Challenge (AH)**

This is what the LORD says— Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God… Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one. Isaiah 44:6-8.

When capitals are used as in *'LORD'*, Jehovah is referred to. Jehovah is King, Redeemer, the First and the Last, the Rock. He challenges the people saying, *"Is there any other? I know not one".* If there is no other with these attributes, then anyone who claims to have them must either be deceived or be a deceiver.

Yet Jesus also claimed to be King (John 18:37), to be the First and the Last (Revelation 22:13), to be the Rock (Matthew 16:18), and is also described by a New Testament writer as the Redeemer (Titus 2:14). So was He deceived or a deceiver? Well, many will simply say that Jesus never existed. But there are some problems with that: firstly, his existence is attested to by ancient historians. Secondly, there are the sheer number of prophecies and allusions to the Messiah we have already seen in this book, Thirdly, future readings will also reveal the exact time and place of the Messiah's birth and anointing, and will show that Jesus satisfied their exact fulfilment. Fourthly, there is the problem of the empty tomb. Identified witnesses to His interment, the large stone rolled across the tomb's entrance, the seal placed on it, and the Roman guard placed over it all testify that Jesus died and was buried. Yet when His followers came early on Sunday morning the stone was rolled back and the tomb empty. Over the weeks that followed over five-hundred people attested to having seen Jesus alive. To this day no-one has ever produced His remains.

Jesus was not deceived, or a deceiver. The answer to the challenge of today's reading is simple: Jesus is Jehovah!

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This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut. Isaiah 45:1.

This passage is unique, not just because it refers to a non-Jew as the Lord's anointed – Messiah, but because it is the only instance in which a deliverer is named. Furthermore, a name revealed more than 100 years before his birth[48].

Cyrus plays a highly significant role in Jewish history. In the year 539 BC, some 140 years after the death of Isaiah, Cyrus conquered Babylon when he, it is traditionally believed, diverted the Euphrates and entered the city via the river bed. By doing so, Cyrus fulfilled Isaiah's words of today's reading. The invasion effectively brought to an end the Jewish exile, and according to the Jewish historian Josephus, Cyrus, when shown Isaiah's prophecies concerning him, became a supporter of the Jews and a believer in their God. Josephus quotes Cyrus as saying, "Thus says Cyrus the king: Since God Almighty has appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is the God which the nation of the Israelites worship; for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judah" (Antiquities 11.1.1). Thus Cyrus became the deliverer of the Jews, and issued the famous decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-2).

Cyrus was the one foretold who would deliver God's people from bondage, and bring them again to worship God in His holy temple. It was the name of Cyrus, God's anointed, that brought hope to God's people. Today there is one Name given to men through whom we may find deliverance from the bondage of sin, the name of Jesus. He too will rebuild Jerusalem so that we may worship there.

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[48] That Cyrus is mentioned by name has led many critical scholars to doubt the unity of the book. They see chapters 40-66 as being written by an unknown author after the exile to Babylon. My personal view is that Jesus would not have based His claim to be the Messiah (Isaiah 61:1, 2 quoted in Luke 4:18, 19) upon a passage whose authorship was in doubt. Both Jesus and the apostles freely quote Isaiah from chapters 1 to 65 which demonstrates that they saw it as written by a single author.

September 5 **Worthy of Praise (AH)**

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. Isaiah 45:22-23.

It must have taken a major shift in thinking for a devout Jew to understand that these words applied to Jesus. For those who could make that paradigm shift, the evidence presented by yesterday's reading must have been overwhelming. For a man who had persecuted Christians to death to one day be able to write, "…*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:10-11), is quite astounding, for he is virtually quoting Isaiah verbatim even though Isaiah's passage categorically states that no other is worthy of such worship.

Perhaps we modern-day Christians underestimate the worthiness of Jesus Christ to receive worship. We treat Him as a Friend, as a Brother, even as a King, but in heaven He is the central focus of all worship. Revelation 5 describes a remarkable scene in which God is seen sitting on His throne, at the very centre of which stands a Lamb – God and the Lamb together on the throne. Surrounding the throne are four living creatures, and surrounding the living creatures are twenty-four elders. Surrounding the twenty-four elders are millions of angels, and with them every creature in God's creation. The attention of all heaven is focused on a wounded Lamb, and as one voice heaven sings its praise saying, "*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!...To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"* (Rev 5:12-13) And the four living creatures said, *"Amen,"*

September 6 The First and The Last (AH)

Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together. Isaiah 48:12-13.

This is not the first time we have seen God calling Himself *The First and the Last.* It won't be the last either. Three times in the book of Isaiah Jehovah refers to Himself as *The First and the Last;* four times in the book of Revelation Jesus calls Himself *The First and The Last,* thus the expression is used seven times in the Bible. In today's reading God uses the title in the context of His creatorship, but in Hebrews Chapter One we read of Christ: … *in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe* (v.2), and, *In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain… and your years will never end (*v.10-12).

Time for the Eternal is not linear as it is for us. For finite man time is a continuum upon which we can exist only at one point. But the Eternal exists at all points on the time continuum so that he is omnipresent, not only in time, but also in space. Hebrews One is a sublime tribute to the Son who is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his person. *"To which of the angels",* the Father says, *"did I ever say, You are My Son"?* The Son He commands the angel to worship; but to the Son He says, *"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever"*. The author of Hebrews was in no doubt about the divine nature of Christ, the Master Designer, the Maker and Sustainer (v.3) of the universe. In the beginning He was there, and in the end He will remain. He is omnipresent; He is the Eternal; He is the First and the Last.

September 7 **The Job Description (DH)**

And now the LORD says— he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself…he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:5-6.

In a previous reading, Isaiah 11:1-3, we read of the type of ruler the Messiah was *to be*. Today we learn what He is mandated *to do* – firstly, to restore Israel to God, and secondly, to bring salvation to the rest of the world. A job description like that makes the role of the Secretary General of the United Nations look like a game.

Of course, a directive such as this one cannot be implemented without some serious planning; here is the desired result, but what are the measurable outcomes? What is the method? And what of the cost? What it doesn't say is that in the process the Servant is to be ridiculed, maligned, persecuted rejected, and, finally, put to the cruellest death imaginable. Perhaps that is the lot of a loyal servant – to do his master's bidding at whatever cost. Only later, in Chapter 53, does Isaiah reveal what it will cost Messiah to fulfil this mandate.

In fact He will pay the price that the Law of God demands for the forgiveness of sins – the shedding of blood, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sin (Hebrews 9:22). Only His blood will be of sufficient value to redeem the entire race of man. There will be other outcomes as well; sin and its originator will be destroyed, peaceful harmony will be restored to the natural world, and God's perfect goodness will be fully revealed to all the inhabitants of the universe who will all know of a certainty that God is Love.

September 8 **The Scarred Hands (H)**

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands…Isaiah 49:15-16.

How many of us have used a ballpoint to jot down a piece of information on the palm of our hand because no suitable paper was at hand? We have to remember not to wash our hands until after we have used the information. But imagine if we were to take a blade and cut the information into our palms; the scars would remain until our dying day so that there was no way we could ever forget it.

Today's passage is not necessarily Messianic, nor is it quoted by any New Testament writer, yet, it turns our attention very naturally to the cross. The wound in Jesus' side will possibly never be seen by men, and those in His feet may be covered. But the scars left by the nails in His hands, uglied by the weight of His body hanging upon them, will be forever a testimony to the price paid for our redemption.

Will the scars really be there forever? I believe so. Although it would be reasonable to assume that the redeemed, in the resurrection, will no longer bear the effects of sin upon their bodies, we know that the risen Christ still bore His wounds because he showed them to the disciples. Being the elder brother of those who are raised in the resurrection of life, Jesus' new body is in the form He will always carry.

It is a paradox that over the eons of time following the restoration of all things, the only ugliness, the only distortion, the only deformity, will be the scars borne by the King. Yet the sight of them will bring only wonder and praise; to the redeemed the only ugliness will be the most beautiful thing in the universe.

September 9 Saviour and Redeemer (H)

I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Isaiah 49:26.

There are a few passages in Isaiah in which God describes Himself using the same words that the New Testament writers apply to Jesus. Some days ago we looked at Isaiah 43:3 which refers to Jehovah as, "... *the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour".* In today's reading God says He is our Saviour and our Redeemer, both words frequently associated with Jesus in the New Testament.

In the New Testament John, Peter, and Paul all refer to Jesus as Saviour, which tells us that they saw Him fully as God. In fact, Paul writing to Titus, in the same breath refers to both God and Christ Jesus as our Saviour; he writes: "[God] *brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour...Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour "*(Titus 1:3-4). Similarly, Jehovah is our Redeemer, yet Job refers to the Redeemer as One who will stand upon the earth in latter days (Job 19:25).

There is a tendency for Bible readers to become so familiar with words like Saviour and Redeemer that the power of their promise is lost. Israel was once a nation surrounded by enemies, staring annihilation in the face. It was at that desperate time that God sent the prophet Isaiah with a promise that one day they would be rescued by a Redeemer. That Redeemer came, and made salvation freely available for all who would believe. Likewise, the world today is facing great uncertainty and hopelessness as societies reject God and His Word. Yet we also have a Saviour and Redeemer who will again stand upon the earth, and our eyes shall see Him.

September 10 The Tongue of the learned (AG)

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. Isaiah 50:4 (KJV).

Surely the child Jesus had read these words in the quiet hours of His boyhood. It is significant that His very first recorded words were an affirmation of His future ministry and His relationship with heaven, "*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* (Luke 2:49).

How much did Jesus know of His pre-advent existence? Prior to His incarnation the Godhead would have planned every detail of the Messiah's mission, yet we must assume that Jesus did not enter the world with any prior knowledge of those details. Just as we do not know the details of God's plan for tomorrow, neither did Jesus.

Yet He knew how to find out about today. That secret was not a secret at all; it was a matter of being continually in touch with heaven through prayer – a privilege which also belongs to us. Jesus early developed the habit of coming daily before heaven to seek from the Father the details of that blueprint. Often He would spend entire nights in prayer. In fact, so dependant was He upon that information, that he made no plans for Himself beyond what was revealed to Him through these daily briefing sessions.

One important aspect of Jesus' daily instruction included the words He was to say to others so that He would "*know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary".* Here is a great lesson for us – the importance of knowing what to share and how to share it. God yearns to bless, and His means of blessing is us. If there is one thing we need daily from God, it is the knowledge of what to say to those He will lead to us today.

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Isaiah 50:6

There is one thing about Jesus we must accept: He practiced what He preached. In His sermon on the Mount, He said, "*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles* (Matthew 5:39-41). It's easy to say that, but not so easy to actually do it. Yet when Jesus was brought before a kangaroo court, flogged, punched, abused, spat upon, and finally nailed to a cross, He uttered no complaint or recrimination, He just said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34).

There is a power in non-violence that no brute force can overcome. India won its independence at the Dharasana Salt Works on the day a group of non-violent protesters were beaten by armed soldiers. Nelson Mandela responded to years of apartheid with a truth and reconciliation commission - and averted a bloodbath. It is one of the incongruities of human existence that light drives away darkness, goodness overcomes evil, and love conquers hatred. Social Darwinism may appear the order of the day, but the question is, who are the fittest. Not necessarily the ones who appear the strongest. Aesop reminds us that no amount of wind and rain will make the farmer take off his coat; only the warming rays of the sun can do that. That is what Jesus was teaching in His sermon and that is the lesson He exemplified at Calvary.

Jesus did not intend just to show us that the Son of man can turn the other cheek, He expects us to follow His example. In the same sermon He reminded us that if we do not follow His example we have fallen short of His expectations (Matthew 6:14-15).

September 12 The Face of Flint H)

Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. Isaiah 50:7.

Beginning at Chapter 9, Luke the gospel writer includes a lengthy passage much of which is not found in the other gospels. Theologians call it 'the great insertion'. It begins in verse 51 with the sentence, "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem".* On several occasions throughout the passage Luke reminds us that all the events he is recording occur on that journey (13:22, 17:11, and 19:28) which ends with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Upon arrival Jesus goes straight to the temple with dire consequences for those who had turned it into a flea market (19:45).

As Jesus began this journey, He knew exactly how it would end – at Calvary. Yet He *set His face* (KJV) to go to Jerusalem. As Isaiah says, "I have set my face like a flint". There was neither fear nor apprehension in this act, no procrastinating as though the events awaiting Him were to be dreaded. This was the execution of a plan designed by the Godhead millennia beforehand; Jesus could not wait to get going; this is what He had come to earth for.

As we read the events of this journey it seems to build up to a climax over the months that the journey takes. The closer the party gets to Jerusalem, the greater the sense of conflict; it's almost as though Jesus is deliberately provoking the Pharisees into the actions they finally took. In fact He was simply 'fulfilling all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15) by giving them the opportunity to do exactly what their scheming hearts wanted to do - to eliminate this supposed threat to their power base. We too can set our faces like a flint when on a mission for the Lord because we too can know that we will never be disgraced or put to shame.

He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! Isaiah 50:8.

So why was it so important that the Messiah be free of sin? Could he not commit a few peccadilloes along the way and still redeem us? If He were to come only to drive out invaders, then maybe yes. But the plan of salvation encompassed something far greater: to free us from the dominion of sin and Satan. Had the Messiah sinned, He would also be under the dominion of Satan and could not deliver us. Therefore it was essential for Jesus that His life be one of absolute purity. According to 1John 3:4 sin is the transgression of the law, and according to Romans 7:7-13 the law is, or includes, the Ten Commandments. Therefore, it was God's plan for the Messiah to live without breaking any of the Commandments, and it was most certainly the prior intent of Satan to make Him break them.

The best way to avoid sin is to love; not to love self, but to love others. True love is to want the best for someone, and there is no sin in that. For that reason Romans 13:10 says, "*Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law".* Love fulfils the law, but cannot replace the law because, like a mirror, the law defines love. If we wilfully harm our neighbour we are condemned by the mirror of the law.

Jesus has such love for us that He could say to His accusers, "*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* (John 8:46). In this question he fulfilled Isaiah's prophetic words. Christ is without sin, and because of that, He has the authority to account us as righteous. Therefore the Apostle Paul could write, "*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus...is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (Romans 8:33-35).

Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over? The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 51:10-11.

From today's perspective this passage may seem to apply only to the Children of Israel. But if looked at from the other side of the Second Advent they take on a new importance. Upon their flight from Egypt the Israelites were led into a wilderness which was to be their home for forty years. The passage then seems to bypass the events of the next 1000 years and go straight to the time when the Jews are released from the Babylonian captivity to return to Jerusalem.

There is a historical parallel between the events referred to here and the events of the last days, for we who live today are in, as it were, a wilderness of sin – a world that is spiritually barren. But one day the Messiah will return to lead His ransomed ones into the heavenly Zion. What will be the joy of that day when the redeemed of the Lord enter those gates with singing, for everlasting joy will crown their heads and never again will sin show its unwelcome head.

It was at the time of the Passover, the first of the annual Hebrew festivals, that God led the Israelites into the wilderness. Now, at the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles, the last such annual festival, God will lead His ransomed back to Zion amid gladness and joy. The Feast of Tabernacles is the only festival in which God commanded the people to rejoice and sing. Every year the Israelites would travel to Jerusalem in anticipation of the great day when God will finally lead His ransomed ones into the heavenly city never to leave again. Today's reading equally promises God's last day people that one day will come their day of joy.

September 15 **Beautiful Feet (GH)**

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Isaiah 52:7.

The apostle Paul applies this sublime passage to those who preach the Gospel (Romans 10:15). The Prototype of those was Jesus who first preached the gospel and then sent out others in His name. To a discouraged John the Baptist Jesus said, "*The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them"* (Matthew 11:5). It was not just the message that made the feet beautiful, but the work that was done as a part of it. For the gospel is more than a message, it is also to relieve suffering, to remove the chains of oppression, to lighten the heavy burden of life. To preach the gospel and then to leave without lightening life's burdens is to fail to do fully the work of Christ.

Why did Jesus do these works? Well, there are several reasons, the foremost undoubtedly being that His loving heart was moved to action at the plight of mankind under Satan's corrupt princedom. Another reason is that He came to establish the Kingdom of Heaven, and in the kingdom there will be no sin and suffering, and no death. Therefore anyone who came to Him in faith for healing not only was healed, but was forgiven. Thus the humble petitioner qualified as a citizen of the heavenly realm and was automatically granted a passport. All who do this work in Jesus' name today are offering citizenship into heaven's kingdom.

The passage for today is also important because it begins a new direction in Isaiah's writing. This passage introduces what is surely the most powerful Messianic passage in the Hebrew Scriptures, that of the Suffering Servant. We shall now turn our attention to it.

September 16 **Lifted Up (D)**

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Isaiah 52:13.

On September 7 we looked at the Messiah's job description. There was another item on this list that was a crucial part of His work on earth: to correct the misconceptions over the meaning of the Messianic prophecies. The people had come to see many of the Messianic prophecies as referring to their nation. Our reading for today is a prime example, for they believed Israel to be the servant who would be lifted up and highly exalted. It is true that had they been faithful to God's Law they would have been blessed beyond measure (see Deuteronomy 28), but they had come to believe that they would receive the blessings in spite of their disobedience. Jesus sought to retrain the people's thinking with His many illustrations and parables about the kingdom of heaven; He also wanted them to understand that it was He, not the nation, who would be lifted up and highly exalted. Not without resistance though, for Jesus was challenged with this question one day: *"We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"* (John 12:34). You can't help but read the antagonism in this question, and Jesus, with insight also revealed in this passage, gave only a cryptic answer. However, to those with open enquiring minds He confided, "... *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up"*, and, "...*if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"* (John 3:14, 12:32).

These introductory verses lay the foundation for a description of the intense suffering the Servant must undergo in order to fulfil His work. We see His acumen and good judgment, His appeal; now we must look as His ultimate exaltation.

September 17 **Highly Exalted (DH)**

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Isaiah 52:13.

What is not stated in this passage is the level of humiliation that must come before the exaltation. No words better express this than those of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians (2:5-11): "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

We mortals have little concept of the glory of the risen Christ and His praiseworthiness – we even use His holy name as a swearword. In heaven it is not so; a most striking picture of the exaltation given Jesus in heaven is seen in Revelation Chapters 4 and 5 which describe the adoration given Him on His return to heaven after His resurrection. In this majestic scene, Jesus stands at the centre of the throne of God as a sacrificial Lamb. Surrounding the throne are first the inhabitants of the heavenly courts, then, about them, the entire populace of angels, then come all the other inhabitants of the natural world – the entire universe is present with one purpose – to worship the Lamb of God. Imagine the splendour of this sight as with one voice these millions join together in the refrain, "*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*

September 18 The Marred Visage (D)

Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness. Isaiah 52:14.

Most artworks depicting the crucifixion fail to capture the extent of what Christ really suffered on Good Friday. You can't blame the artists; reality doesn't always make a good story. And really, how popular was Mel Gibson's movie?

Today's passage need not necessarily refer just to Calvary. There is also the wilderness experience as well as Gethsemane that were to affect the Saviour's appearance. Let's consider the wilderness experience. When Jesus walked away from His carpenter's tools and went down to meet John in order to "fulfil all righteousness", it was a normal looking 30-year old who went into the Jordan, but the Man who came out was very different. Still recognisable as Jesus yes, but with the Light of heaven shining upon Him, and the Power of the Holy Spirit emanating from Him, He was glorious to behold.

But what of the Jesus who came out of the desert six weeks later? We know virtually nothing of the details of that time. As recorded by Matthew, the temptations seem fairly mild – just an hour or so of Satan's time on the last day of the fast? Hardly! Too much was at stake for both contestants. This conflict was over the future of humanity and even the rulership of the universe. Think of the implications of Jesus actually worshipping Satan.

Jesus won the battle, but at what cost we may never know. The Man who returned to the Jordan six weeks later was emaciated, gaunt, and barely recognisable, '*his form marred beyond human likeness'.* Yet in His eyes were a new authority and self-assurance for He had communed with heaven; His way was set, His course marked out, and His victory certain.

September 19 **Awesome (D)**

So will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. Isaiah 52:15.

How many world leaders can you think of who have been so influential that they have been held in awe by the leaders of other nations? In recent history, Nelson Mandela may come somewhere on the list. Other names may or may not include George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Mohandas Gandhi. Yet none of these are in the same class as the Servant. In fact it is daringly audacious to claim that any future world leader will ever be so regarded by another nation, let alone many nations – who ever heard of such a thing?

In this passage Isaiah prophecies that the Servant will sprinkle many nations. This term 'sprinkle' implies a temple activity - cleansing - as in the ceremony of the Red Heifer. But the Septuagint says that many nations will be amazed at Him. Whatever the correct translation, the result is the same; many nations, including their kings, will hold the Servant in awe. As did the Queen of Sheba before Solomon, they will see for themselves, and know that they were told only the half of it (1Kings 10:6-9). They will be cleansed of their idolatry, and will sit at His feet. Now that is an astounding prediction.

Towards the end of His ministry, as the religious authorities plotted His death, some Greeks sought an interview with Jesus. When He was told of it He said, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified"* (John 12:21). He knew its significance, for at His birth wise men had come from the East looking for Him; now as His death approached, wise men came from the West with the same intent. Already the words of Isaiah were coming to pass. However, there will come a time when all nations will seek Him, but when that happens He will no longer be the Servant, but the King.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? Isaiah 53:1.

Many commentators think that Isaiah 53 is talking about Israel, but not so the Apostle John who wrote, *"Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfil the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"* (John 12:37-38).

To what message is Isaiah referring? The message that began in 52:7, which says, "*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news".* Yet even as Isaiah presents this wonderful picture of the Servant, he is acutely aware that few believe it. In his day it was not believed, in Christ's day it was not believed, and in our day it is not believed. No wonder Jesus so frequently stressed the importance of belief. The Apostle John mentions belief over sixty times in his gospel and letters, including the passage quoted above. Why is it so important to him? Because he knew how important it was to Jesus; that Jesus had said*, "if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins"* (John 8:24).

Do we fully understand how important it is to believe the message of Jesus? In the Kingdom there will be people who have lived appalling lives. There will be people there who have displayed every miserable character trait imaginable, but there will not be anyone there who did not believe. Those who do not believe in Christ do not come to Him for forgiveness, and if there is no forgiveness, then their sin still stands, and sin cannot enter the Kingdom. If they rejected the Atonement made by Christ, then they must atone for their own sin, and the only way left to do that is through their own final death. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you *will* be saved (Acts 16:31).

September 21 **The True Superhero (D)**

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. Isaiah 53:2.

Today we live in a world of superheroes, fictional men and women who fight arch-criminals and clean up the world's messes flying at supersonic speeds through sky and sea. They all have one thing in common: they complement their superhuman feats with noble faces and herculean bodies. Not so the greatest Superhero of them all. Imagine a typical tradesman, wearing overalls and a beanie, getting into his truck to join the Monday morning peak hour, his lunch box on the seat beside Him. That is how Jesus would have appeared were His earthly ministry among us today.

Why did Jesus choose to live among men in such humble appearance? Would not His ministry have been much more successful if He had looked like Superman instead of Clark Kent? Maybe if His kingdom had been of this world, looking the part would have made it easier to attract followers, especially after miraculously feeding His armies and restoring His fallen warriors to life. But His kingdom was not of this world, it was a spiritual kingdom to which He drew followers. It was vital to the success of His mission that people not follow Him for the wrong reason – hence His strong reaction to an attempt to make Him king (John 6:1-15).

When God appeared to Moses, it was in a humble bush so as not to destroy him with His glory. In the same way, when the Father "prepared a body" (Hebrews 10:5) for the Messiah to inhabit, it had to be one that veiled His true glory. Neither was it to be any earthly attraction that drew us to Christ, but the testimony of the word of God through the prophets alone. "*Search the Scriptures"*, Jesus said, *"for they testify of me"* (John 5:39 KJV), and that applies equally today.

September 22 **Rejected (D)**

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isaiah 53:3.

There was a time early in Jesus' ministry when He gained popular support from the people. After feeding five-thousand in Galilee, there was a movement, in which even some disciples were no doubt implicated, to make Him king by force. After all, with a leader who can miraculously feed an army, and heal battle wounds, how easy it would be to drive out the Roman invaders. Had Jesus desired popularity He could have had it. But truth is more important than popularity, and as the meaning of His words, "*I am the bread which came down from heaven"* (John 6:41), began to sink in, the tide of popular opinion began to ebb. From that time many disciples walked away never to return (v. 66).

How would Jesus have felt as He watched so many followers walk away? How does a bridegroom feel when his bride changes her mind at the last minute? How does a bride feel when stood up at the altar? By turning from Him they were turning their back on the very gift He had come to give, eternal life. He loved them and they walked away. This was only one of many occasions that tore at Jesus' heart strings, until finally the people were to cry out *"We have no king but Caesar"*

Soon Jesus will return to the earth. How many will be waiting for Him? Until around the middle of the nineteenth century most of the western world believed in God. Even if society was not perfect at least they believed. But over the generations since that time, fewer and fewer have believed until now believers are considered to be weak-minded. Does Jesus sorrow any less today than He did that day in Galilee? Soon He will return as King, and still He is despised and rejected of men.

September 23 **Afflicted (D)**

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. Isaiah 53:4.

Christ had no human advantage over other men. In fact, the odds were stacked against Him because His sinless life and sacrifice were to meet every contingency. There is no degree of suffering laid upon men that was not laid upon Christ. Had there been, He could not have stood in their place. Due to the circumstance of His birth He was even considered illegitimate by those who rejected Him. Additionally, His parents were so poor they could afford only the most inexpensive offerings, and to make matters worse, He came from the crummiest town in the land. All this meant just one thing: this man was a sinner, born in sin and raised in sin, He could never have God's blessing, could never be wealthy, and could never amount to anything. To the Jewish mind adverse circumstances and poverty were the results of sin. Therefore this Jesus must be a sinner - exactly what Satan wanted them to think. If Jesus were a sinner, He could not be a Saviour. If the people could be brought to see Him as a sinner, they would never accept Him as the Saviour. Even the disciples were not immune from this misconception; *"Who sinned",* they asked Jesus of a man born blind, *"This man or his parents"? "Neither",* said Jesus, *"It was so that through him God's glory might be manifest"* (John 9:1-3).

Yet God, in His wisdom, has given us the account of Job to help us understand that suffering comes from Satan, not from God. True, God allows suffering, but He is not the author of it. Job's companions tried to persuade him that his afflictions were the result of his sins. When Job protested his innocence, they accused him of self-righteousness. But God commended Job and rebuked the companions. The truth is that the Messiah's sufferings were not because He had sinned, but because we have sinned.

September 24 Fulfilling All Righteousness (D)

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5.

As Jesus was being arrested, one of the disciples tried to intervene by swinging his sword. Jesus immediately rebuked him saying, *"Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"* (Matthew 26:54). The Scriptures to which Jesus refers concern the events surrounding Calvary, primarily Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. At first reading Jesus appears to be manipulating events to fulfil prophecy. But that is not what is happening: there are some messianic prophecies that are not only predictive of what will happen to the Messiah, but are instructive to the Messiah as to what course of action to take in order to "fulfil all righteousness". Jesus' words to the blade-wielding disciple are an example of this. By trying to defend Jesus, Peter was doing just what Satan wanted him to do – to follow a plan other than that dictated by prophecy. Peter had hoped to save his Master, but his intervention undoubtedly would have led to violence, which could have resulted in the early, non-sacrificial, death of Jesus as well as the death of all the disciples. In that way Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 would have become failed prophecies and the Church stillborn. No wonder Jesus quickly stepped in and took control.

This raises an important question: of all Scripture prophecies concerning Christ, how many of them failed to come to pass? People judge prophets by the percentage of their correct predictions, which, in the case of all modern so-called prophets, including Nostradamus, is virtually zero. What shall we conclude then, for the Bible's authenticity, in view of what we have read between the covers of this book concerning the promised Messiah and His fulfilment in Jesus Christ?

September 25 **The Peacemaker (D)**

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5.

The Messiah's suffering was not because *He* had sinned, but because *we* have sinned. That was yesterday's conclusion. Today's text fleshes it out by adding that what happened to *Him* has brought peace and healing to *us*. In other words, His suffering has restored a state of peace between man and God. Maybe the Apostle Paul was thinking of this verse when he wrote*, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1).

But what is the legal basis for such a thing to occur? If I am found guilty of a crime, can I really walk free because someone else has agreed to take my punishment? Has justice been served? Will people be satisfied with that? What of my guilt? Does my redeemer become the guilty one? What of my criminal record? Do I continue to bear it, or does my substitute take that too? Is my redeemer's offer provisional upon my acceptance of it? Or is it made willingly anyway, even if I choose not to accept it?

In my case answers can be found, but heaven's redemption goes further. Messiah not only takes my guilt upon Himself, but He becomes sin (2Corinthians 5:21). My criminal record is erased and no longer exists (Colossians 2:14; Romans 8:1). Whether Messiah's sacrifice legally saved everyone (born saved, but lost through unbelief), or whether it made provision for our salvation (born lost, but saved through belief) is a deeper question that theologians have debated for two thousand years. What we do know for sure is that heaven is entirely satisfied with the legality of man's redemption. Messiah's sacrifice on our behalf ticks all the boxes that heaven demands to restore peace between man and God.

September 26 **The Shepherd (D)**

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6.

In His parable of the lost sheep, Jesus tells of the faithful shepherd who will not give up until the wanderer is returned to the fold. In this parable only one sheep is lost which may refer to the individual sinner or to the whole world in the context of the unfallen worlds. Jesus might have told the parable a bit differently; He might have said, "what do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and all of them wander away, will he not go and look for them all?

If a hired shepherd lost all the sheep in his care his life probably would not be worth living. If he owned them, then no doubt he would be facing financial ruin and would not stop till he found the last one. This is the scenario depicted by Isaiah in today's reading. The entire flock has gone astray with sheep wandering into fields, gardens, roads and busy highways causing damage and disruption everywhere. Crops trampled, vegetable and flower gardens eaten, traffic disrupted, and serious accidents caused as speeding drivers try to avoid the roaming miscreants.

And the shepherd is held responsible for the lot.

What could cause an entire flock to go walkabout? Wolves or wild dogs would do that. An enemy of the shepherd would also be happy to do it. A storm could have a similar effect, and of course thieves are a part of the equation. All of these are enemies of God's people who are continually assailed by predators, hatred and ridicule, and the storms of life. There is one other event that will seriously lead the flock to scatter, and we will learn about that when we reach the book of Zechariah.

September 27 **Silent (D)**

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. Isaiah 53:7.

These are the words an Ethiopian government official was reading one day in the back of his horse-driven limousine when the Apostle Philip appeared, seemingly out of nowhere to ask him if he knew what he was reading. *"Of whom does the prophet speak*", the traveller asked, *"himself or somebody else?"* (Acts 8:34). Philip then, beginning with that passage, explained to him what the Scriptures said about Jesus.

I wonder what Philip said about this passage; maybe he mentioned how, when Jesus was brought before the high priest to listen to a bunch of contradictory and baseless charges laid against Him, He just stood there saying nothing, showing neither irritation nor frustration. Maybe Philip also mentioned the scene at Calvary as the raucous rabble heaped insults and curses upon the condemned Man, and His ears appeared closed to it all. The only voice He seemed to hear that day was the one that said, *"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom"* (Luke 23:42).

As a result of this Bible study, the official wanted to be baptized at the very first waterhole they came to. He left Ethiopia a devout Jew and returned a devout Christian, presumably the first one to take the message of Christ back to his country, still to this day a Christian nation.

Can we learn a lesson from Christ's silence? What kind of a Man was He? He certainly did not try to hide His emotions, but He was not overly excitable. How about us? Do we know when and when not to react? Can we remain quietly dignified under duress? Have we learned of Christ so that in all our dealings with men we bring glory to God?

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. Isaiah 53:8.

This passage has proved difficult to translate. A reasonable paraphrase of the first two clauses based on the original is, *He was totally humiliated and denied any form of justice, And who even cares to speak about it?* In fact, Messiah's trial was no better than a kangaroo court. Some of the illegalities are as follows: capital cases and capital verdicts could not be heard at night, contradictory witnesses were disqualified, the accused cannot be condemned on his own testimony, the accused cannot be treated as guilty before the trial begins.[49] The Apostle Peter may have been making reference to this when he said*, "Whom ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay"* (Acts 2:23 ASV). The word 'lawless' is translated from a word meaning 'outside the law'.

One other interesting provision is that if someone could be found to speak in favour of the accused, he could be spared. That not one person, even among the disciples, was willing to come forward in Jesus' defence says much about the power wielded by the religious authorities. Which humble Pashtun villager today would dare defend someone against the Taliban?

What if I had been there, would I have defended Jesus? A part answer to that question lies in whether or not I defend Him today, for He is still on trial. As John Stott put it, "Jesus Christ stands on trial, not now before the Sanhedrin, before Pontius Pilate the procurator or Herod Antipas, but at the bar of world opinion".[50] Do I stand up for Him in a world that still shouts, "Crucify Him"? To a world that says, "We have no god but science"?

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[49] https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/701-theological-implications-of-the-trial-of-jesus.

[50] John Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, p.54. Quoted in http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=17340#.U4etznZjGT4.

September 29 **Honoured in Death (D)**

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9.

How did the Romans deal with the bodies of executed convicts? Normally, they would leave them on the cross until they disintegrated. This however, was not approved of by the Jewish authorities because it is written, "*If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse"* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). What was considered shameful to the Jewish mind was that a man should not be properly buried in the land of his ancestors. Therefore, Jesus was considered cursed in being made to hang on a 'tree' (and so could not be the Messiah), and, if the authorities had had their way, they would have dumped His body somewhere, possibly in the Potter's Field (with Judas), and covered it with a pile of stones. Or perhaps they would have taken his body to 'Gehenna', the ever-burning landfill site in the Valley of Hinnom. What could never have been predicted of Jesus was that He would be laid in the tomb of one of the rich men of Jerusalem. Only a true prophet could get that detail right.

Isaiah attests to the total innocence of the Messiah describing Him as having "*done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth"*. In the book of Revelation a similar statement is made of those who later go on to find redemption in Christ; they are described as follows: "*And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God"* (Revelation 14:5 KJV). As is Jesus, so are His true followers. Not because their behaviour is perfect – it isn't, but because they walk in His steps and have become acculturated with His loving character. They have lived their subsequent lives according to the will of their heavenly Father. They fully understand that for their transgressions He was stricken; by His wounds they were healed.

September 30 **Crushed (D)**

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. Isaiah 53:10.

One of the hardest trials for a loving parent to endure is to see their own beloved child undergoing a painful hospital procedure because it must be done in order to help them get better. Their heart breaks as they see their innocent child suffering such pain and torment and not understanding why. How those parents would do anything to take their child's pain upon themselves. If we were to ask them if they want their child to suffer so, would they say no or yes? No because of the suffering, but yes because the procedure will save the little one's life.

Was it the Lord's will to see His beloved Son lashed and beaten and left to die in agony? Did God cause Jesus to suffer as Isaiah asserts? Again, the answer is no and yes. It was infinitely painful for God to endure the events of that Passover Friday, yet the Godhead had planned it to happen that way from the day sin first entered the world (Genesis 3:15). Then, when the nation of Israel was born God gave the people the annual Passover ceremony to help them understand what was one day to happen. But even as the ceremony became a meaningless ritual to many of them, God knew that with each passing year, the day the Godhead would be torn asunder grew ever closer. Then one year, *"...when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"* (Galatians 4:4-5 KJV)

The hint of divine agony in today's reading reveals the depth of what God and His Messiah were willing to endure because of their love for us. We are indeed precious to heaven.

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53:11.

Another image that might have served yesterday's reading is that of the mother and newborn. It is natural for a young woman to desire a child, and she does not consider the pain it will cause her when it comes into the world. But when the agony is over and the babe is safe in her arms she is satisfied. She had produced a life which might change the world. The Messiah did not consider the suffering He would endure that we might be born again; He did what is natural for a loving Divine to do. But as birth cannot take place without pain and bloodshed, so to give new birth to a people who will become citizens of a heavenly realm does not come without the same.

The second part of today's couplet gives the reason He will be satisfied; because in His suffering He will bear the iniquities of many and they will be justified – they will be as though they had never sinned. In fact He will bear the iniquity of the whole world, and should the whole world accept the gift the whole world will be saved.

We should not think the Messiah's suffering was over an ordinary execution. In order for man to be restored to God's image, the Son of Man must die the death that the unrepentant unbeliever must die, and that is not the sleep at the end of 'threescore and ten', it is the second death of the book of Revelation, the final end of those who choose not to believe. It was the thought of eternal separation from His father that tore from His lips the despairing cry, *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"* As He took upon Himself our sin He became Sin and was to be treated as Sin will finally be treated, by removal from the camp of the people – forever.

October 2 **The Intercessor (D)**

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12

We concluded yesterday's reading with the thought that Jesus, on the cross, could not see through the darkness that enveloped His soul. All He knew was that He had become something the holiness of heaven could not abide, and for the first time in eternity He was shut out.

Yet death could not hold the Author of life, and as Peter told a Jerusalem crowd, *"...God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"* (Acts 2:24). Jesus was raised to be given a "*name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:9-11). With His sacrifice complete, and provision made for the salvation of every human who has ever lived, or whoever will live, Jesus became the Great Intercessor for humanity (Hebrews 7:25). That intercession began even on the cross as He prayed that His murderers be forgiven because they had no idea what they were really doing. His prayer on the cross was not simply a phrase uttered; it was a heartfelt cry on behalf of the brutes who drove in the nails. Everyone who heard that prayer knew that this was no ordinary man they were putting to death.

Today Christ intercedes for us "*with groans that words cannot express*" (Romans 8:26). Just as He did on the cross, He makes excuses for us looking for every conceivable argument in our favour so that all that can be done and said on our behalf will be.

October 3 **The Husband (AGH)**

For your Maker is your husband— the LORD Almighty is his name— the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. Isaiah 54:5.

Maker, Lord, Holy One, Redeemer. All names that apply to God which we have seen also apply to Christ. To these one other name is added: Husband. Did Jesus ever claim to be our husband? Certainly! In promise and parable the claim is there. For example in John 14:3 He said*, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* These words allude to the ancient Jewish marriage custom in which a bridegroom, after the betrothal ceremony and payment of the dowry, would add a room to his father's house for his bride.[51] Now Christ has paid the required dowry, and has gone to prepare a new home for us in heaven.

The time of the bridegroom's preparation was also a time of activity for the bride; she must prepare for the wedding and also prepare herself for life in her new home. She and her bridesmaids could not afford to be idle for they did not know exactly when her man would come. Only by being alert and watchful could they anticipate when his coming was drawing near. Jesus drew a spiritual parallel to this in His parable of the Ten Virgins in which He warned His hearers, *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour"* (Matthew 25:13).

Yes Jesus is our husband and we know not when He will come for us. But if we are faithful we will have the privilege of hearing the words of another great promise: "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear...Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb..."* (Revelation 19:7-9).

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[51] There are a number of websites, both Jewish and Christian, which describe ancient Jewish marriage customs in great detail and explain their spiritual significance.

For your Maker is your husband— the LORD Almighty is his name— the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. Isaiah 54:5.

We can't leave this passage yet because it touches on an issue which affects all people of all ages, that of our tendency to think that we are somehow more favoured of God than others. Within religions and within sects of religions we all see ourselves as being the spiritual elite, not like 'those others'. Jonah wanted God to destroy the pagans of Niniveh, and God reminded him that they and their cattle were as precious to Him as Jonah was. Elijah had to be reminded that he was not the only faithful one left – that there were still seven thousand who had not 'bowed the knee to Baal'. The disciples wanted Jesus to bring fire down upon some Samaritans because they rejected Him. Peter was reluctant to share the Gospel with Gentiles because he saw them as unclean. In Revelation 18:4 Christ exhorts, "*Come out of* [Babylon] *my people*", and we ask how there can be people of God in Babylon. Worse than that we presume to know who are 'Babylonian' by their external appearance.

Our Maker is God of the whole earth. He created every field and forest, vale and mountain, sea and meadow, man and beast. He is God of all. But now His Creation is in darkness and He needs those who will bring Light to the darkness. Those he chooses as light-bearers are not so because of any inherent superiority, for they are not the Source of light, they are only its reflectors. Like the moon that shines in the darkness reflecting the sun's brightness, so those chosen are not called to judge the world, only to bring light to it. Somehow we need to overcome the propensity to shun those who appear unattractive to us, to fear those we do not understand, and to judge those we deem inferior. If we could just be more like Jesus we would have compassion on them, for we would see them as He sees them - as worth dying for.

...The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. Isaiah 59:15-16.

The context for the book of Isaiah is the threatened invasion of Jerusalem by the Assyrian army. Had the Israelites been faithful to God's law they would have been a prosperous and successful nation and a blessing to others. However, they lost their way so that God was no longer able to answer their prayers because He could not hear them; they were praying to the wrong god. God cannot work for a people who have forgotten Him.

Yet God was not impervious to their suffering, for He saw in Judah's plight a type of what will come upon the whole world in generations to come. Just as Israel forgot God and His Word, so today the world has made God redundant and His Word, the Bible, mythology. What is to become of a world when its global population rejects God? The nations that were built upon the culture of the Bible no longer pray to Him, and many of those who do cannot accept Him as Creator, one of His main claims upon us. What does God think as He looks down on us today? We are becoming just like Judah of old, surrounded by the Assyrians of social and political instability, terrorism and extreme weather events.[52] How can God bless a world that has rejected Him?

Yet today's reading tells us that God knows we need someone to intervene, someone who will step in and save us. But who? He sees no-one. Therefore He comes Himself. As with Lot in Sodom, there were not enough righteous to save the city, so He brought out the few He could save. Before the walls of the world crumble, Messiah will come to rescue the few. Time is short; now is the time to believe.

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[52] According to the World Economic Forum's *Global Risk's Report, 2014,* the ten major threats to the world are: fiscal crises in key economies, structurally high unemployment/ underemployment, water crises, severe income disparity, failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation, greater incidence of extreme weather events, global governance failure, food crises, failure of a major financial mechanism/institution and profound political and social instability. Source *USA Today*, January 2014.

October 6 Garments of Vengeance (D)

He...put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes... Isaiah 59:17-18.

These verses seem out of character with the previous ones. Garments of vengeance? What are they? This passage, in its primary context, refers to God's removal of the Assyrian threat from Israel. But it is a type of last-day scenario as well, and in that context there are some two thousand years between verses 16 and 17. Messiah's arm has worked salvation ever since the first sin, but there will come a time when He will act with a holy zeal against His enemies. Not a vengeance of hatred, for He does not hate people who reject Him, He just does not know them. *"Depart from me, you evildoers"*, He says to them, *"for I never knew you"* (Matthew 7:23). No, this vengeance is one of righteous indignation against all that has troubled His people. Now He will remove every obstacle to their peace and happiness.

There will be some surprises when it is revealed exactly who these evildoers are. Messiah's words of Matthew 7:23 were directed at those who professed to be His followers, those who claimed to preach the Gospel and to do miracles in His name, but who, like Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-14), saw the Gospel as a means of becoming rich. If there is one lesson to learn from this it is that we must always be ready to search our hearts that we are right with God. Many will say that is unnecessary for we may have complete assurance of our salvation. Yes we may, but we live in the days of the antitypical Day of Atonement, the type of which required the people, in the days leading up to it, to examine carefully their hearts for anything that might separate them from a holy God. Now we live in those days, and soon we will see coming in the clouds of heaven a God who is dressed in the garments of vengeance. Let not that vengeance be directed at us.

October 7 **Like a Tidal Bore (D)**

From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along. Isaiah 59:19.

Had Isaiah known what a tidal bore was he might have used it as a simile in this verse. In certain rivers and bays which experience extreme tides, the latter, rather than gradually rising, will come in with a rush creating a large thunderous wave that can travel long distances upriver; surfers love them. The largest bore occurs on the Qiantang River in China with a wave height of up to 9 metres (30 feet). Nothing can stand in the way of such a mass of charging water - boats and swimmers beware. Yet the tidal rush brings fresh life to those creatures that depend on it.

Messiah's plan for our salvation climaxes in His return in the clouds of heaven on the last day of earth's current existence. There will be nobody who will miss that day. Of His second advent Jesus said, *"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other"* (Matthew 24:29-31).

Like the tidal bore, there will be no resistance when Jesus returns. All will hear; all will see. Many will run, but none will escape. There will be no surfing this wave. Yet He will bring fresh life to those who depend on Him. Like the creatures hidden below the exposed low tide sands, they will arise again to welcome their Lord and Master, and they will ever be with Him.

October 8 **Mt. Zion (DEH)**

The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins, declares the LORD. Isaiah 59:20.

Zion is first mentioned in the Bible in 2Samuel 5:7 when David conquered "the stronghold of Zion which is the city of David". The original city of David lay just south of the hill known as Mt Moriah which became the site of Solomon's Temple. Once the temple was built, the whole city-temple complex became known as Mt. Zion, and was seen as the dwelling place of God rather than as a fortress.

Isaiah's prophecies tend not to differentiate between what are local, or first advent, or Second Advent events. Thus he may have been referring to Cyrus the Persian commander bringing Judah's Babylonian captivity to an end, or to the first advent, or to the Second Advent. The writer of Hebrews points out that there is also a spiritual Mt. Zion. He writes, "*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God ...*" (Hebrews 12:22). In this we see that while many of the godly people of the Hebrew Scriptures are types and shadows of Christ, so the city of Jerusalem in Israel is a type of the heavenly Jerusalem. Likewise David's Zion anticipates a heavenly Zion. Both are the home of God – originally on earth; ultimately in heaven.

In Revelation 14 John sees Christ, in the form of a lamb, standing on Mt. Zion, and with Him 144,000 who are the redeemed of the earth. This is not only the Zion of Hebrews 12:22, but also the Zion of Isaiah 59:20. John sees this Zion as, "*the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband"* (Revelation 21:2). So there will come a day when Zion will again stand on the earth, and the Lamb will be its King – for all time. It will not be a fortress, but the dwelling place of God and those who have repented of their sins.

The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. Isaiah 60:19-20.

What picture did Isaiah have in his mind when he wrote this? Not since the Creation of the world in Genesis One have the Scriptures presented such a concept. Isaiah's prophecies have, until now, concerned the Israelites' local situation (even if we can retrospectively see in them a more far-reaching application). Now Isaiah is telling the people something new, that one day sin will no longer exist. Isaiah is saying that one day Jehovah will be the source of the world's light so that the sun and moon will no longer be needed for that purpose:

In Revelation 21:22-27 the Apostle John uses similar words with reference to Jesus: "*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there... Nothing impure will ever enter it...but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

Just as Isaiah closes his prophetic work with a glimpse of the new earth, so John closes the book of Revelation, and indeed the New Testament in the same way. Again we see the risen Christ as Jehovah. They are one and the same Person. In fact many Bible students have noted how the book of Isaiah is a synopsis of the entire Bible.[53] Isaiah prophesied the Messiah, and there is One and One only, who meets the specifications of Isaiah's words, Jesus of Nazareth.

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[53] It has two main sections (Chapters 1-39 being history/judgment and 40-66 being 'Gospel'). There are also parallels between the subject matter of Isaiah as compared to that of the entire Bible. However, it is possible to read more into this than is perhaps wise. For instance, the chapter and verse divisions were not placed in the Bible by God, or by Isaiah, but by scholars in later centuries. Therefore, it is possible that some of the parallels are purely of human invention.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners... Isaiah 61:1.

Had Jesus not claimed in Nazareth that this passage referred to Him (Luke 4:18-21), we might have been forgiven for assuming Isaiah was talking of himself. However, Isaiah has been glorifying the Servant throughout his writings, and is not now about to glorify anyone else.

The word *anointed* comes from the Hebrew '*Mashiach*" from which we get the word *Messiah*. Thus Jesus said in effect, "The Lord has made me Messiah...." In ancient Israel it was prophets, priests and kings who were anointed to serve God. They each had roles to play in the life and religion of the Israelites: The prophet was God's representative to the people, the priest was the peoples' representative to God, and the king was God's representative in rulership, justice and judgment.

However, in this passage it is evident that the work appointed to the Anointed One is far more diverse than any one role. This One is anointed to preach the good news – the role of a prophet, to bind up the broken-hearted (those who sorrow for sin) – the role of the priest, to set free captives and prisoners – the role of a king. Thus when Jesus said to the people of Nazareth, *"Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing",* there was no doubt in the minds of the hearers what He was saying. The good citizens of Nazareth were incensed that one of their number should speak such words. They did not realise that they were the ones privileged by God to hear the Messiah announce His arrival.

... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair... Isaiah 61:2-3.

When Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 He stopped after *to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,* and chose not to mention the vengeance bit. It is of note that the Lord's favour lasts for a year, but His vengeance only for a day. Yet it was the vengeance on which the Jews dwelt. They longed to see their enemies on the receiving end of God's wrath. Jesus' words, "*Love your enemies"* (Matthew 5:44) were completely alien to His hearers who would gladly have seen, for the Romans, a *day* of the Lord's favour and a *year* of God's vengeance. For this reason Jesus did not quote the vengeance part of the passage.

There is a lesson for us here; there is much wrong with the world today, and one doesn't need to look far to see it. In Noah's day God observed "*how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"* (Genesis 6:5). Jesus added, *"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man"* (Matthew 24:37). Yet we are not justified in dwelling on the day when 'they get what they deserve'. Better to use the year of God's mercy to try to save them. That does not come naturally; it is hard to work for the salvation of those we instinctively fear; we can do nothing for anyone if they can see fear in our eyes. Somehow we must be changed so that the fear is transformed into love, for *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear"* (1John 4:18). That change can come about only through the power of Christ to rebuild our hearts. That is what we must seek for Him to do for us.

October 12 The Covenant Maker (GH)

For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. Isaiah 61:8.

This is not the first everlasting covenant God has made with men. The first was made not only with men, but with the animals, and even with the earth itself (Genesis 9:8-17).

The second was made with Abraham. We have seen that the word 'covenant' signifies a cutting. In Genesis 15 God walked in the Blood Path made when Abraham cut open the sacrificial animals. Abraham could not also walk in the blood because that was something only God could do. It pointed to the day when Messiah would take the Blood Path to Calvary. Abraham's part in the 'cutting' came in Genesis 17 when he was circumcised and given the instruction that all covenant males must also be circumcised.

The third mention of an everlasting covenant was made to Moses concerning the twelve loaves of showbread sprinkled with frankincense and placed in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. These, of course, represented the One to come who would be the Bread of Life, of whom those who eat will never hunger again (John 6:35).

The writer of Hebrews was in no doubt about the significance of the everlasting covenant, for he concluded his letter with these words*: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...through the blood of the everlasting covenant..."* (Hebrews 13:20 KJV).

The reward of the faithful, promised through Isaiah, is the everlasting covenant made with mankind when Jesus' flesh was opened and His blood poured out. Promised to Abraham and Moses; fulfilled by Christ. He walked in the blood; we eat the Bread.

October 13 **Alone (DH)**

"I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. Isaiah 63:3-5.

Have you ever wondered how lonely it must have been for Jesus, not just during His ministry, but throughout his life? Once He understood His 'Father's business', He found Himself on a mission that no other man could ever understand. How do you explain to someone that the purpose of your life is to save the world from Sin, and to restore mankind again into God's image? What kind of responsibility is that? And not one human companion to discuss it with. Even His mother had limited understanding of Messiah's true mission.

The nadir of Jesus' aloneness came in the Garden of Gethsemane when those few who might have understood lacked the motivation to do so. Their experience might have been very different if they had remained awake to pray with and for Him whose 'soul was sorrowful unto death'. What heavenly things might they have seen and heard had they done so?

Yet the context of today's passage is not Gethsemane; it is of another act of loneliness, the day that Messiah must finally act against all that has opposed Him and all who have refused to believe in Him. God made the world to be inhabited by holy men and women, not sinners. Long has He borne with us, but there will come a time when our cup of iniquity is full to the brim. On that day He will tread the winepress of vengeance alone for it is not a work that any man can do.

See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD. Isaiah 66:15-16.

Fire is the means God will use to destroy the earth at the last day. Not a flood as He did last time, not an asteroid (unless it causes the fire), nor a nuclear war or any other means of man's self-destruction. The destruction of the planet is God's work, not man's. On that day Jesus will appear out of the clouds amid the sound of heavenly music, and every eye shall behold it (Matthew 24:30, 31; Revelation 1:7). It seems that although we have developed the capacity to destroy the planet and ourselves with it, we will not perish until we understand exactly why we are to perish. On that day "*every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:9-11). The Apostle Peter well understood this and prophesied "...*the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men"* (2Peter 3:5-7).

Why fire? Because fire purifies. As the furnace incinerates, so God will cremate all trace of sin and corruption on the planet's toxified land, polluted sea, and tainted atmosphere. Man was to be steward of the planet, and now, by our greedy exploitation, it must all be reduced to dust so that no trace of sin remains. Then for one thousand years "*shall the land rest, and enjoy her Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in our Sabbaths when we dwelt upon it"* (see Leviticus 26:34-35; Revelation 20:1-10). This may seem bad news now, but the good news comes tomorrow.

As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD. Isaiah 66:22-23.

God never takes away without giving something better in its place. Just as Jesus took away two thousand pigs from the people of Gadara (Mark 5), so, due to the faithful witness of the healed demoniacs, when He returned some months later He was able to feed four thousand from just a few loaves and fishes (Mark 8). He had taken away the unspiritual and replaced it with the spiritual. He had taken away the unclean and replaced it with the clean. He had taken the pork and replaced it with the Bread of Life. That is what Jesus does.

Isaiah foresaw the day when God will take the world away from us. Like the Gadarene porkers, the world He will take away is unclean. Like the loaves and fishes, what He will give in their place is a miracle. The people of Gadara were initially upset at the loss of their pig trade, but later, when Jesus came back, then they understood and were glad. So, we need not fret that our world as we know it will come to an end, because in its place will be something infinitely better.

The new Planet Earth will be wonderful to behold. Yet its greatest beauty will not be its pristine scenery, it will be that its Creator will choose it as His home. The Apostle John also saw the new earth and its capital city, New Jerusalem, and wrote of it*: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God"* (Revelation 21:3). This city will be the Temple of the Universe to which each new moon and each Sabbath the people will come to worship their Creator and Redeemer.

October 16 **The Saddest Day (EH)**

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. Jeremiah 8:20 NJKV.

This passage is not Messianic, yet maybe no words more aptly capture the sorrow experienced by Jesus as He looked over His beloved Jerusalem and saw what might have been had the people believed. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate...* "(Luke 13:34-35).

In tomorrow's reading we shall explore the ways in which Jeremiah's sorrow – for he was known as the weeping prophet – illustrated the desperate sadness that overcame Jesus as He saw the inevitable end of a nation that could have had so much, yet would lose everything through unbelief. In Matthew 24 Jesus describes the events that will overtake Jerusalem in AD70 when the Roman army will utterly destroy it. His description hides - almost hides - the utter sadness in His voice. For He is looking at the final end of a promise given to Abraham that through his offspring would come a holy nation which would, if faithful, become an example to the world of how God magnifies those who follow His will. Yet Matthew 24 is about more than Jerusalem, it portrays the end of the world when all mankind will have rejected God and, save for a faithful remnant, will be removed from the earth. Today's passage portrays the great sadness that will prevail in that day. True, those of a rebellious nature will have only fury toward Jesus when He intervenes in our history, but there will also be those who knew better, but refused to pay the price of discipleship. *"Not everyone",* said Jesus, "*will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father"* (Matthew 7:21). For those the harvest is past, the summer ended, "and we are not saved".

Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. Jeremiah 9:1

Jeremiah's gentle and sensitive nature is a powerful type of Christ's beautiful personality. Perhaps God looked ahead at all those living at the time of Jerusalem's suffering, searching for someone *"whose heart is perfect toward Him"* (2Chronicles 16:9); someone who would be just the man He needed to lead His rebellious people through the coming crisis. Maybe this rebellious generation made it hard for Him to find such a man. But then he saw Jeremiah and knew He had His man. And all this before Jeremiah was even conceived. *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart",* He said to the apprehensive young man (1:5). There can't be much God does not know about us if He knows all that before we are even conceived.

Jeremiah prefigures Christ during the latter part of His ministry, in Jerusalem in conflict with the religious leaders. He also gave many warnings about the events soon to befall Jerusalem, instructing His followers how to survive them. Yet when He rebuked, it was always with tears in His voice and it was with an aching heart that He warned about what was to come. It was profound love for wayward man that motivated Christ in His warnings of the coming destruction, far more so than for His own imminent sufferings. *"If only you had known*", He sobbed, *"If only you had known*" (Luke 19:41-42). Yes, when God's eyes ranged throughout Jerusalem searching for a Jeremiah, He wanted a man, not only with courage and determination, but a man who would feel the agony He was to feel at the death of the City of God. This was not a work for a vengeful prophet like Jonah; this needed a man who could say, *"my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the LORD's flock will be taken captive"* (13:17).

October 18 **The Olive Tree (G)**

The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. Jeremiah 11:16.

The olive tree was the most valued fruit tree in Palestine, and God chose it to represent His people. With its roots securely planted in Abraham, its branches have grown many and broad with a reach extending the world over. Romans 11 explains how, over time, unproductive branches – those who failed to believe – have been removed while other branches – those who have adopted the faith of Abraham – have been grafted in.

This grafting and amputating process has early beginnings. For example, during the flight from Egypt the company was joined by a 'mixed multitude' (Exodus 12:38) who were not of Israel. Those of this group who became circumcised and adopted the faith of Abraham were new branches grafted from 'wild' olive trees, and shared *"in the nourishing sap from the olive root"* (Romans 11:17). They too were now a part of the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12). Rahab of Jericho and Ruth of Moab were two women grafted in from wild olive trees who were also chosen by God to carry the Seed that was to be the world's Redeemer.

Fancy that! The Redeemer is the Seed of both natural and wild branches, both Jews and Gentiles. As if that were not enough, Rahab and Ruth were considered by men as the scum of the earth, a sex-worker and a product of incest. Yet, not only were they grafted into the Olive Tree, they were chosen to be in the ancestral line of the Messiah. Amazing Grace! Truly God does not show favouritism (Acts 10:34). Through Christ, all may be of the commonwealth of Israel, for "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:28- 29).

October 19 **Being Like Him (EH)**

I hear many whispering Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him! All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him. Jeremiah 20:10.

Jeremiah said nowhere near as much about Messiah as did Isaiah. Yet his life illustrates Messiah in a way that Isaiah's did not. Jeremiah is an illustrative type of Christ; not a Christ-type in the sense that Melchizedek and David are, but as one whose life illustrates that of the Messiah. For example, in today's reading Jeremiah complains that everything he says and does in under the scrutiny of his enemies who hope to find something against him. Of Jesus Luke wrote, "... *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose Him fiercely and to besiege Him with questions waiting to catch Him in something He might say"* (Luke 11:53-54). Like Jesus, Jeremiah was known before his birth, called as a youth, remained single, and lived an itinerant life. Known as the weeping prophet, he was ridiculed, persecuted, accused of being possessed by demons, and finally put to death.

Yet unlike David, the man after God's own heart, for example, who saw all his sufferings as a part of God's plan for good, Jeremiah did not seek forgiveness for his persecutors. *"Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger"* was his prayer (Jer. 18:23). In this Jeremiah was not a Christ-type, for Christ said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34).

We will not criticise Jeremiah for what appears to be a human weakness. But we will learn from it that Jesus instructs us also to reflect His perfect character in our own lives so that when people see us they see Him. That does not come overnight, but is the work of a lifetime of growing into Christ so that it becomes natural to be like Him. That is Sanctification.

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness. Jeremiah 23:5-6.

Who was this king who would save Judah and bring safety to Israel? The problem is that Judah was not saved, but taken captive to Babylon, and the northern kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed over one hundred years earlier. Looks like Jeremiah got this one completely wrong.

In the chapters to come, Jeremiah will give further insight into today's text. For example, in 31:33 he will talk of the day when God will make a new covenant with the people which will be written their hearts and in their minds. This covenant, he says, will be one in which the law of God will be so firmly established that parents will not need to teach it to their children because it will be hard-wired into their minds.

Jeremiah was referring to just such a condition when he wrote the words of today's reading. In that the ten tribes had already been swallowed up, and the Jews were about to be taken captive, Jeremiah's promise of immediate salvation would have been a vain utterance.

Following Babylon the returning Jews looked for the day when the Branch would come, but they looked for a literal fulfilment of the promise, and are still looking. Christians, on the other hand, understood that the promise was for a spiritual kingdom made up of the faithful from every people group in the world. Explaining this, the Apostle Paul wrote, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:28-29).

Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!" Jeremiah 26:11.

This is one of many allusions to Christ's suffering and death in the experience of Jeremiah. During Jesus' trial, a self-righteous high priest used almost the same words, *"He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" 'He is worthy of death' they answered"* (Matthew 26:65-66). We stand amazed that these men who supposedly knew the Scriptures by heart could not see that they were fulfilling the very words of God's witnesses the prophets, not just in what they said, but by the events of their lives. Let's take a minute to look at the way Jeremiah's experience screams out "Messiah" to all who are listening:

Both were a 'gentle lamb' cut off from the land of the living (Jeremiah 11:19, Isaiah 53:7, 8). Both suffered being innocent (Jer. 26:15, Matthew 27:4). Both were accused of being madmen (Jer. 26:9, John 10:20). Both were accused of being self-appointed prophets (Jer. 29:7, John 8:53). Both were mocked and ridiculed (Jer. 20:7, Luke 18:32). Both had verbal traps laid for them to make them condemn themselves (Jer. 20:10, Luke 11:54). Both had someone speak in their defence (Jer. 26:16, John 10:21). Both were secretly plotted against (Jer. 18:23, John 11:53).Both predicted Jerusalem's impending destruction (Jer. 21:10, Luke 21:20).

Why did God use the lives of His prophets to reveal the Christ? Maybe so that His friends would develop a profound trust in the Bible as the Word of God, while His enemies would be without excuse for their ignorance. It all boils down to one thing: Read the Bible.

October 22 **Rachel's Children (CF)**

This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more." Jeremiah 31:15.

The great romantic tragedy in the Bible is the death of Jacob's beloved beauty, Rachel, while giving birth to the son she named Ben-Oni, *Son of my sorrow*. Rachel was entombed at Ramah not far from Bethlehem, and the infant, named Benjamin by his father, was to grow to become the father of the people who remained loyal to Judah after the death of King Solomon.

Perhaps like no other, Rachel is timeless, for her sorrow is repeated the world over in every generation and land. Even in death Rachel was not spared grief, for in the days of Jeremiah the Babylonian army invaded Judah and took away every last one of her children captive to a far-away land. It was past Rachel's tomb that their death march led them, uncertain if they would ever see their beloved land again.

There was another grief for Rachel to endure. Again it occurred in Bethlehem. A despotic Seleucid king, threatened by the birth of a child some eastern magi had told him was born to be King of Israel, slaughtered every child he could find in the region in order to ensure the Christ-child did not survive to become King. Matthew noted that this incident fulfilled Jeremiah's words, "*Rachel* [once again] *weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more"* (Matthew 2:18).

Yet Jeremiah saw something else: that there was to be hope for the future; that Rachel's children would return to their land (v. 17). There is hope for us too, for Herod did not destroy the Christ-child, and He too returned to His land. And because of it so shall we. Then Rachel shall weep no longer, for she shall be re-united with her children forever.

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people...'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah 31:31-34.

There is no record, in the Hebrew Scriptures, of this new covenant ever being established. Undoubtedly, faithful men like Ezra and Nehemiah were conscious of it as they re-established Jerusalem and its temple after the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 10:3). However, the only other reference to it is by Ezekiel who places it sometime in the future (Ezekiel 37:26).

So was this new covenant a failed promise? Certainly not! It was Jesus who next raised the promise of the new covenant, only we fail to see it because the English translators used the word *Testament* instead of *Covenant* - a case of not seeing the forest for the trees. What we call the New Testament might equally be called the New Covenant, for the Greek word is the same for both. Now we know exactly when Jesus mentioned it: "*This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you:* (Luke 2:20 KJV).

So now we have it, Jesus said in effect, "I am the New Covenant", and because no covenant can be made without the cutting of flesh, His blood was offered to seal the Covenant. The writer of Hebrews has much to say on the matter: "*But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to* [Moses'] *as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one...For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance..."* (Hebrews 8:6-9:15). Jesus is the New Covenant; the Gospel is its written record; Calvary ratified it.

October 24 Incomparable Sorrow (DFH)

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. Lamentations 1:12 KJV.

No-one who has heard Stainer's moving oratorio, *The Crucifixion*[54], will forget his poignant recitation set to the words of today's reading. Stainer beautifully captures the utter desolation that pierces the heart of Christ as He hangs on the cross, derided and scorned by those who have been His love from the beginning. *Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?* But more than the spurned lover, it is the Father's presence He yearns for, but cannot discern, as He takes upon Himself the crimes of the world.

A critical Bible student will point out that Jeremiah's words more accurately describe Jerusalem's sorrow as she comes to terms with the Babylonian conquest, especially the loss of Solomon's Temple and the Sanctuary, the dwelling place of God (see Lamentations 2:7). Yet Stainer is not wrong to apply these words to Christ; the experiences of the Children of Israel anticipated and foreshadowed the life and ministry of Messiah, so that the story of one is the story of the other. The slaughter of the innocents, the calling out of Egypt, the wilderness experience, the mountain experience, the manna, the snake on the pole; all these and more prefigured the life and work of Messiah as a witness to who Jesus was. No less a witness, the heartbreak as God's people finally paid the price for their rejection of God. Now Jesus must also experience God's rejection, for He was to take their sin upon Himself.

We too pass by the Cross of Christ. We too hear His words, *Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?* When we hear them we remember that He took our sin upon Him too.

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[54] John Stainer, *The Crucifixion: A Meditation on the Sacred Passion of the Holy Redeemer,* 1887, #17, Is It Nothing To You?

The LORD's anointed, our very life breath, was caught in their traps. We thought that under his shadow we would live among the nations. Lamentations 4:20.

Commentators have enjoyed conjecturing upon whom this passage refers. Some think it is good King Josiah, but he was killed in a battle with the Egyptians, not caught in a Chaldean snare. Zedekiah is the logical candidate, but he deserved no lamentation from Jeremiah. However, he was of the dynasty of King David, so was entitled, even if not worthy, to be called the Lord's anointed.

Although New Testament writers do not mention it, this passage strongly prefigures Christ. He is the Lord's Anointed and is our very life breath. He was caught - but not unawares - in the plot hatched between Judas and Caiaphas, and He was lamented by His followers who said of Him, *"... we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel".*

When Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans, the long cherished hope of the Jews to live just like other nations, under a monarch, came to nothing. Since Zedekiah there has been no king of Israel, and there will not be again until *"He comes who is called Faithful and True…"* (Revelation 19:11-16 KJV).

The Jews had wanted a king over them because they felt inferior to the surrounding nations. What they had forgotten was that God never intended them to be like the other nations. They were to have been God's *"treasured possession"* (Exodus 19:5), chosen from among the nations to be "*above all the nations"* (Deuteronomy 7:6, 10:15). Had they believed, they would have been the most successful people and culture ever known, a brilliant light to the nations. God still seeks such a light, and we who seek to obey Jesus are that light. If we were all to shine as we should, just imagine what blessing and light would illuminate the earth.

October 26 He Who Lives Forevermore (AH)

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north--an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal. Ezekiel 1:4.

Ezekiel Chapter 1 is a description of the power and glory of God – not easy to put into words. The complexity of the vision, and the detail of Ezekiel's account, suggests that the prophet must have spent a long time contemplating what he saw before putting quill to parchment. This chapter is a credit to Ezekiel's writing skills.

The overall picture contains at least four elements. Firstly a dazzling fiery red-hot cloud, secondly, within the cloud four living creatures, thirdly, a series of wheels within wheels moving in different directions and rimmed with eyes; finally, a magnificent throne upon which sits a Being with the appearance of a man. We shall look at these elements over the next few days.

From Ezekiel's perspective, the entire vision reveals God's glory. The Apostle John also saw a vision similar to Ezekiel's, and gave a description of it which helps us better understand what Ezekiel saw. Ezekiel saw God; John saw Jesus. There are differences though, in what the two men describe. Ezekiel's vision *closes* with a throne scene and upon the throne a Being he cannot portray. John's vision *opens* with a throne scene, and upon the throne a Being he does not try to portray (Revelation 4:1-3). John has already seen a vision of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary (1:12-16) which has similarities with Ezekiel's vision, at least in terms of a fiery brilliance with a shining amber and bronze hue. Ezekiel is confounded by what he sees, but now Jesus has come to reveal God, and John is comforted because he feels the hand of his Friend on him and saying, "Don't be afraid…I am He who was dead, but lives forevermore. Amen"

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And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. Ezekiel 1:26 (KJV).

Soon after giving the Ten Commandments, God summoned Moses and Aaron, two of Aaron's sons, and seventy elders to the foothills of Mt. Sinai. Exodus 24:10 records, "and they saw the God of Israel, *and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity* (Exodus 24:10 NKJV).

When they saw God He was standing on a pavement made of sapphire. Some have associated the blue of the sapphire with the law of God. Blue is one of the three colours associated with the earthly sanctuary, the other two being purple and scarlet. Scarlet represents sacrifice – the altar. Blue represents the law – the Most Holy Place containing the Ten Commandments. Purple, a blend of blue and scarlet, represents the blending of law and grace in Christ's mediatory work in the Holy Place. In contrast, the idolatrous woman of Revelation 17 wears purple and scarlet, but the blue is nowhere to be seen (v4). Why? Because her enmity is against the law of God and those who keep it (Revelation 12:17).

In Revelation 4 and 5 we find a description of the heavenly throne in symbols very similar to those seen by Ezekiel. Both see a Being in human form sitting on the throne. Both see four living creatures near the throne. Ezekiel's throne appears to be made of sapphire, and John sees a 'sea of glass' before the throne. In that sea is normally blue, it is very possible they both saw the same scene. Yet John sees a detail Ezekiel is not shown; he sees, 'in the midst of the throne', a sacrificial Lamb before which the entirety of heaven has fallen down in worship, saying *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain..."* (Rev. 5:6-14). Who is the Lamb? It is Jesus.

He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them. Ezekiel 2:3-5.

These words are spoken to Ezekiel, but they are also words that might have been given to the Messiah as He prepared to come down to earth as a man. Indeed it was an obstinate and stubborn people to whom Jesus was sent.

Throughout the book of Ezekiel the prophet is called 'Son of man', in Hebrew *ben 'adam, 'adam* meaning 'mankind'. Jesus also chose to refer to Himself as the Son of man thus declaring Himself as one with mankind. One thing though, that is of interest to Bible students, is that Jesus always added the definite article to 'Son of man'. Over ninety times Ezekiel is called *Son of man*; over eighty times Jesus calls Himself *The Son of man*. Never is Ezekiel referred to with the article, and never did Jesus refer to Himself without it.

Why did Jesus call Himself the Son of man? He could have called Himself the Son of God, but that would have created a barrier which would have inhibited the Gospel – truth must ever be clothed in prudence. When you save someone's life you have a special relationship with that person. Jesus has saved our lives, and by calling Himself the Son of man, He has identified with us in a special way by naming Himself after us. "In dying for us He has bound Himself to us with a tie stronger than if we had never fallen, a tie that can never be broken because now the Son of God is also the Son of man".[55]

[55] Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, p25.

Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken. Ezekiel 34:23-24.

Jesus is in the temple at Jerusalem, the city of the Great King (Matthew 5:35). He has just offended the city rulers with His words, *"Before Abraham was, I am"* (John 8:58), and they have tried to stone Him for it. Now He is making His way through the streets when he sees a man blind from birth. Compassion seizes Him and the man walks away restored to full sight. But it's the Sabbath, and as all good Pharisees well know, sight should not be restored on the Sabbath. The man is excommunicated – no longer allowed to bring a sacrifice to the temple, no longer able to have his sins forgiven (John 9).

When Jesus is told what has happened, He says to the Pharisees, *"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep*…" (John 10:1-6). The rulers did not discern that Jesus was calling them thieves and robbers. They did not understand what they had just done; they had cast out of the temple a man whom Jesus was drawing to Himself. A lost sheep was being drawn into the fold and these false shepherds had climbed over the wall and driven it out again.

When a sheep is driven out of the fold by a thief, the good shepherd immediately goes looking for it, rod firmly in hand to drive off the thief. Thus Jesus searched Jerusalem until He found the man, and when He did He said to him, *"'Do you believe in the Son of Man?"* "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?" "*I am He".* "Lord, I believe", said the man, and worshipped Him (John 9:25-38). This is Ezekiel's Shepherd.

October 30 **The Stone (DH)**

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed...it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future.... Daniel 2:44-45 NASB.

This is a prophecy of the Messianic kingdom. Daniel 2 describes a statue of a man made up of different metals, each metal representing a different world empire: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The feet, a homogenous mixture of iron and clay, represent the nations of the known world following the breakup of the Roman Empire. The vision ends with a great stone striking the image on its feet, destroying it, and then becoming a great mountain. The mountain is the Kingdom of Heaven, and the stone is – you guessed it – the Messiah, its King.

When will this kingdom be set up? Daniel also wants to know, and he is told, *"It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed"* (Daniel 12:7). A cryptic answer, but easy to understand, for a time is a year, and 3 ½ years is 1260 prophetic days, or 1260 years. When the 1260 years are complete, God's people must wait until the enemy of God and man has caused them to be reduced to complete powerlessness. Then, when all good is gone, and the whole world can see the evil for what it is, then the Stone will strike the feet. Then the inhabitants of the world will, "... [hide] *themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains; and they* [say] *to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"* (Revelation 6:15-17).

October 31 **King of Kings (H)**

The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret". Daniel 2:47.

It was the custom of the kings of the empires of that era to take the title *king of kings*. An example of this is seen in Ezra 7:12 in a letter from Artaxerxes to Ezra. It seems the title was so often used that it had become a cliché, for Daniel himself calls Nebuchadnezzar king of kings (Daniel 2:37). We do something similar today when we call the pope Holy Father without batting an eyelid, when in fact the Holy Father is the One Jesus prayed to in John 17:11.

Daniel began his interpretation of the king's dream by calling Nebuchadnezzar king of kings. But when he had finished the interpretation the king was so impressed with Daniel's God that he immediately recognised Him as the true King of Kings. As the Septuagint puts it, "*your God is God of gods and Lord of lords and Lord of kings"* (Dan 2:47 NETS).

Twice in the book of Revelation Jesus is called Lord of lords and King of kings. In both cases the setting is the final conflict at the last day when the forces of evil marshal their armies against the Lamb of God (17:14), but will be defeated because the Lamb, in one of the great paradoxes of Scripture, is too powerful for the blasphemous beast and its blood-thirsty rider.

At that time Christ will ride forth on a white horse, Faithful and True, the Word of God. His eyes like fire and a crown on His head, He bears a great sword that brings justice to the nations. Across His chest and draping His thigh is a banner that reads, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (19:11-16). John records, "and I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude…saying, '*Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!'"* (19:6). Maybe Nebuchadnezzar too is in that crowd.

November 1 **The Fire-walker (A)**

He [King Nebuchadnezzar] *said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."* Daniel 3:25.

Who did the king see in the furnace? Some versions say the fourth *looks like the Son of God*, but presumably a Babylonian king would interpret the fourth person in terms of his own religious understanding. Both 'Son of God' and 'a son of the gods' are grammatically correct, but the latter is probably closer to what the king would have really said.

Then why include it in this book? Because the Bible is written from God's perspective, not Nebuchadnezzar's. It was God's will to honour the faith of the three young men who had just said to the king, *"Our God, whom we serve, is able to rescue us from the furnace, but even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up"* (3:17-18). Now that takes some courage. These young men have just refused to obey a direct command of the king to bow down to an image of himself. When all present bowed, these lads remained standing. That is the kind of faith God is looking for today in a world that bows down to every idol society sets up. These young men lived by a code that said, *"You shall not make any idols to bow down to them"* (Exodus 20:5, Leviticus 26:1). Can we still live by such a code today? The God who honoured Shadrach, Meshak and Abednego still honours those who obey Him in the face of adversity.

There was another reason for the faith of the three men; they knew the words of Isaiah the prophet. *"When you pass through the waters I will be with you...When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned. Nor shall the flame scorch you. "For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, Your Saviour"* (Isaiah 42:2-3). It was their Saviour who walked in the flames; the One with them in the fire was Jesus after all.

...behold, One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, He came to the Ancient of Days...Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom...His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away; And His kingdom one which shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14.

In Daniel 2:44 we saw that the flesh kingdoms were replaced by an everlasting Rock kingdom. Daniel 7 repeats the vision with more detailed imagery; in this vision, as the stone replaced the image, so the four beasts make way for 'One like the Son of Man' who is given a kingdom that will never be destroyed. The stone of Daniel 2 then represents One who is in human form, but who is worthy of the most exalted title of all, *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (Revelation 19:16).

When Jesus was brought before the high priest at the farce that passed for His trial, the frustrated priest could find no charge that would stick. In exasperation he cried out, "...Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God". The reply Jesus gave alluded to Daniel 7 and signed His death warrant: "*You have said: nevertheless I say to you, Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"* (Matthew 26:64).

Why is He so worthy? Revelation 5:9 -10 tell us why: *"For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood…"* It seems that heaven attaches the greatest importance to the redemption of the fallen. The Plan of Salvation is not just one project of many in the annals of heaven; it absorbs the total attention of every being there. The day the risen Christ stood before the throne and opened his hands before the Father was the day the entire universe came together and sang, *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!"* (5:12).

Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For 2300 days, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed. Daniel 8:13-14 (NKJV).

This challenging prophecy must be important because heaven wanted Daniel, and hence all of us, to understand it – that's why the angelic conversation took place. The cleansing of the sanctuary refers to the Day of Atonement, the annual day when the sins of Israel were placed on the head of a goat, which is then taken far away from the camp leaving Israel cleansed of its sin. Daniel might have assumed the angels were talking about the earthly sanctuary. However, Solomon's Temple had been in ruins for around 50 years by this time, and was not to be rebuilt for another 20 (Ezra 6). Therefore the 2300 days cannot refer to Solomon's Temple or its successor in Ezra's day[56]; it must refer to the heavenly Sanctuary which was the pattern for the earthly one (Hebrews 8:5). In that case the cleansing was to be something far bigger than *Yom Kippur*; it was for the entire world. At the end of 2300 days, actually 2300 years, the heavenly temple was to be cleansed of the sins of the whole world.

What kind of a Priest could officiate on such a day? This Priest had to be of a higher order than that of Aaron. The blood He brought before the Mercy Seat was not to be that of a goat. This was an altogether more excellent ministry. In fact there is only One worthy for this, and because there is only One, He must needs be the Great Everything; not only the High Priest (Hebrews 8:1-6), but the Sacrifice (1Corinthians 5:7), not only the Showbread of Life (John 6:35), the Menorah of the World (John 12:46), the Sweet Incense (2Corinthians 2:15), but the very Temple itself (Revelation 21:22).

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[56] The vision of 2300 days was given in the 3rd year of Belshazzar's reign which ended in 539BC, 24 years before the dedication of the new temple. Therefore the 2300 days, being about 6 ½ years, cannot refer to any earthly temple.

Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For 2300 days, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed. Daniel 8:13-14 (NKJV).

The question must be asked, When does the 2300 years begin, and when does it end? Is it really years? Or is it 2300 literal days? If so, what event is referred to? One thing we have learned from these readings is that God's Plan of Salvation is far more extensive than we might have thought. More than bringing a single geo-political nation back into right relationship with God, it involves the entire world and its connection with heaven. Therefore for this prophecy to refer to a 6 ½-year period some time in Israel's past is implausible. Why would the angels so want Daniel to understand that? Why would they tell Daniel that the visions given him refer to the distant future (8:17-26)?

The key that unlocks this prophecy is given to Daniel some time later, in fact in the very year that Babylon is overthrown by Medo-Persia (9:1). The change of government led Daniel's mind back to Jeremiah's promise that the Jews would be only 70 years in captivity - and now that time was nearly up. He put on sackcloth, fasted, and fell on his knees before God, and the Lord heard his prayer. Even as he was praying the angel Gabriel came to him and told him that he was sent to explain to him the 2300 days[57]. *"Seventy weeks",* he said, *"are decreed for your people…from the going forth of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes…"* (Daniel 9:24-25). Now this is interesting: the explanation of the 2300 days is found in the date of the anointing of the Messiah. So it's all about the Messiah after all. I guess we should have expected that.

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[57] In the book of Daniel. The word *Mareh* is used to refer to an appearance or vision of something that is seen in heaven, and is associated with the glory of God. *Chazon*, represents things seen that pertain to events on earth. In today's reading Gabriel comes to explain the *Mareh*, and explains it in terms of the seventy weeks prophecy, thus linking the two visions as one.

November 5 **Seventy Weeks (D)**

Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Daniel 9:24.

This prophecy stands alone in importance because it is the only one that gives a timeframe for the arrival of the Messiah. We shall look more closely at the timing later, but today we look at what will take place after seventy weeks: to finish transgression, to bring an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to fulfil the words of the prophets, and to anoint the Most Holy.

Sometimes we find our lives coming to a crossroads where everything seems to come together, and our destiny is altered. Graduation, marriage, death of a loved one; these can all do that. For heaven's calendar, the 70 weeks, actually 490 years, are like that. The 70 weeks, especially the events of the last week, are to alter the course of history. Life in heaven and on earth will never be the same again. We may need to spend a few days on this passage in order to give it its due. What was the pivotal event this prophecy looks to? In one word: Calvary. In fact: the anointing, the ministry, the death, the resurrection of the Messiah.

Today's reading talks of finishing transgression and putting an end to sin. The Hebrew word used for *finish* suggests bringing to completion. Not that there would be no more sinning, but that transgression was to receive a deadly wound like a defeated combatant who slinks away crippled to find a place to die. When the devil failed to entice Christ in the wilderness, when the Second Adam said to Satan, "Get thee hence…" (as the First Adam was to have done), the devil's plan to "become like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14) came to nothing. This was Satan's first great defeat, and he will receive many more before the seventy weeks are fulfilled.

Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Daniel 9:24.

The next part of this passage talks of atoning for wickedness and bringing in everlasting righteousness. What must the Messiah do to atone for wickedness? Leviticus 17:11 answers this question: "…*I have given [blood] to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life".* So, heaven has a law which states that when someone sins - and sin is the transgression of God's law (1John 3:4) - blood must be shed. Whose blood? Well, the one who sins of course, "*for the soul who sins will die"* (Ezekiel 18:20). Now here is a serious 'Catch 22': we can atone for our sins, and hence be forgiven, but only by our death can we atone for our sins. The only way around this one is to find a friend willing to die for *our* sins. Of course that friend would have to be without sin because, if not, he could only die for his own sins.

By Gods amazing grace, we do have such a Friend, and He was willing to come to earth as one of us, live a sinless life, and allow His blood to be shed so that all who should apply it to their lives might receive atonement. Not only those who *have* ever lived, but all those who *will* ever live are covered by this blood. This tells us a lot about the holiness of God. Sin must never come into His presence, even at the cost of the sinner's death. Yet in spite of this God dearly loves the sinner, and will go to any length, even the death of His own Son, to allow us back into His presence.

Daniel 9 helps us to see how important atonement is to God; He has put so much planning into it, and eagerly anticipates what He is going to do, that He tells us exactly what it is He will do, and when He will do it.

Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Daniel 9:24.

The third thing the Messiah's arrival will do is to seal up vision and prophecy. In other words, with His advent, vision and prophecy will be fully realised. When Jesus said, "*these are Scriptures that testify about me"* (John 5:39), He was referring to the Bible of the day, the Old Testament. As we have seen over the past months, the Messiah's life, ministry, and sacrificial death are found again and again, sometimes overtly, sometimes through the experiences of others, sometimes in type and symbol. The Bible is not just a history of God's dealings with man, nor is it just a catalogue of rules and regulations, and it certainly is not just a book of myths and fairy tales as some would have us believe; the Old Testament is about the Messiah as we have seen in this devotional.

But there was to come a time when there would be no more vision, and a time when all prophecy would be accomplished. That time was fulfilled in the birth, life and death, of Jesus Christ. When all the types and shadows met the events they foretold, then prophecy was complete. Calvary became the great axis about which earth's history turned. It was to the Cross that godly men and women of yesteryear looked forward, and to the Cross that the godly of today look back.

One day soon the redeemed of all ages will join together before a great heavenly throne. When they do they will sing two songs. The first is the song of Moses; the second is the song of the Lamb. They are both songs of deliverance, the first from the Egyptians, the second from sin and death. Both are really the same song: "*Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power. Thy right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy"* (Exodus 15:3 KJV).

Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Daniel 9:24.

The last part of Daniel 9:24 talks of the anointing of the most holy. We might assume this refers to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. In fact the Hebrew expression 'most holy' generally refers to the temple and the items it contains, not a person. So does this passage refer to the anointing of the Messiah at the beginning of the 70th year of the prophecy? Or could it be the heavenly temple that will be anointed in preparation for the work of our heavenly High Priest, the risen Christ? It is unlikely to refer to the temple in Jerusalem for Jesus said of it, *"Behold, your house is left to you desolate"* (Luke 13:35).

Maybe something bigger than the Jordan is in today's reading; Jordan was the anointing of The Prophet, but temples and priests are also anointed. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the heavenly Sanctuary and its High Priest are also to be anointed. The Temple is to be anointed for the work it must do following the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb. The High Priest is to be anointed for His work of intercession on behalf of those who have claimed the blood of the Lamb.

When does this anointing take place? Did it take place at the Ascension in the middle of the 70th week? Or is it what Steven saw in AD34 in his famous vision of Acts 7:56, *"Look…I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God".* In fact whether today's reading relates to the Most Holy Messiah or the Most Holy Place is really a moot point, for all that is Most Holy is One. When John the Apostle saw in vision the New Jerusalem he saw no temple in it because *"The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple"* (Revelation12:22).

November 9 **The Sixty-nine Weeks (D)**

Know and understand this: from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens', and sixty-two 'sevens'. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. Daniel 9:25.

At first reading this passage seems a little inconsistent. The first sentence talks of the Messiah, the second talks of *it* without stating what *it* is. The explanation to this is also the key to the correct understanding of the entire passage. Verses 25, 26 and 27 are written in such a way that the first part always refers to the Anointed One, and the second part always to Jerusalem. Therefore the passage is much easier to understand by lumping together all the Anointed One parts, and then reading together all the city parts.

Verse 24 told us what will happen after seventy weeks, or 490 years. Now verse 25 tells us when the 490 years begins – at the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem - 457 BC. The Messiah will come 69 weeks, or 483 years, after the decree, i.e. 27AD. This is the date Jesus was baptized and anointed as The Prophet. The reason the 69 weeks is written as 7+62 is probably because it would have taken about 49 years to complete the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This work was certainly done under the most trying of circumstances.

With a prophecy as easy to understand as this, it seems strange that so few were aware of it. Even though John the Baptist proclaimed it for months only few listened. Now we are in the time of the end when Jesus is about to return. The prophecies are there, the signs of the times are evident before our eyes. Many faithful men and women do the work of John the Baptist in proclaiming the soon coming Messiah. Yet the world today is less interested than ever in what the Scriptures have to say. Noah, John, and now the last days, nobody believed then, and now they still don't. Strange, isn't it?

November 10 He Will Have Nothing (D)

After the sixty-two 'sevens', the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. Daniel 9:26.

Only the first sentence refers to the Anointed One. The second and third sentences refer to Jerusalem, undoubtedly to its destruction by Titus in AD70. The sixty-two weeks follow the seven weeks, so that the Anointed One is cut off after sixty-nine weeks. But not immediately after, for verse 27 tells us that it occurs in the 'midst' of the seventieth week. As we saw yesterday, the sixty-nine weeks brought us to AD 27 when Jesus was baptized by John in order '*to fulfil all righteousness*' (Matthew 3:15). On that day a unique event occurred: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit came into the company of men to mark an event whose significance, lost to the men, was supreme in the calendar of heaven.

The awkward phrase, *'and will have nothing'*, literally '*and nothing to him*', hints at something of the true cost of what the Anointed One was to do, a cost totally beyond the ken of its beneficiaries. It would be difficult enough for me to lay down my life for a friend even if doing so would win me posthumous accolades. But to do so knowing that my friend may never know what I did – may even refuse to believe I did it – may even ridicule me for doing it – that would take love beyond all human understanding. The Apostle Paul described Calvary as foolishness to those who will perish (1Corinthians 1:18). Today those who consider themselves wise, notably those anti-theists who elevate science to godlike level, love to pontificate about the idiocy of a deity who would allow his subjects to put him to death. They don't understand that God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom, and that He has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. Daniel 9:27.

As with the two preceding verses, only the first two sentences talk of the Messiah. The third talks of Jerusalem's temple and what Titus and his army will do to it. However, the third sentence does have a Messianic application, as we shall see later. The 'seven' of this verse is the last of the seventy; it began with the Messiah's anointing in AD27, and continues for seven years until 34 AD when the time decreed for Daniel's people and their holy city (v.24) will come to an end. Today's verse focuses on what happens in the middle of the week, but has little to say about what happens at the end of the week. However, what happens at the end of the week is a vital part of God's plan for His people, and cannot be ignored.

New Testament chronology suggests that Jesus was baptized in the autumn of AD27.[58] In that Jesus was 'cut off' during the Passover of AD31, His ministry lasted exactly 3 ½ years with His death occurring exactly in the middle of the 'week'. As Jesus hung on the cross in the darkness of the afternoon of Good Friday, promise and prophecy met history. At the ninth hour of the day, the Passover sacrifice was taking place in the temple. At the same time a greater Passover was being sacrificed even as the priest raised the knife to the throat of the lamb. As he did so a cry came from the cross, *"It is finished"*, and the curtain in the temple separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was ripped apart from top to bottom by an unseen hand. Now the way into the Most Holy was opened forever, and no longer was there need for a sacrifice, for the Sacrifice was made once and for all time. The Messiah had put an end to sacrifice and offering just as Gabriel had told Daniel it would happen.

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[58] The date of Jesus' baptism cannot be pinpointed with 100% accuracy. According to Luke 3:1 John began baptising in the 15th year of Tiberias Caesar. He would have preached for around six months before baptising Jesus.

November 12 The Decree Fulfilled (D)

He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. Daniel 9:27.

To complete Daniel 9 we need to look at the last half of the seventieth week. What happened 3½ years after Calvary? Seventy weeks were decreed for the city and its people, and the seventy weeks ended in 34AD. But the New Testament does not explicitly state the event, or events, that happened in that year. Jesus left clues as to what would happen; one is found in the parable of the tenants (Matthew 21:33-44) in which He stated that the kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to another nation. At another time He said to some Pharisees, *"Look, your house is left to you desolate"* (Luke 13:35). Obviously, at the end of 70 weeks the Jewish nation would no longer have exclusivity as God's chosen.

Several events are recorded in the annals of the fledgling church that fulfil Jesus' words. One is the stoning of Steven beginning a period of intense persecution of Christians under Saul of Tarsus, which resulted in the believers scattering to "Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1) and there preaching the Word. Samaritans, it should be noted, were not considered by Jews to be Israelites. There, Philip baptized an Ethiopian who also took the Word of the risen Christ to Africa. Thus the Word began to be preached to non-Jews. Later, in Acts 10, we find Peter given a vision to take the Gospel directly to the Gentiles. Gentiles now became Christians without first becoming Jews so that Christianity was starting down the path of becoming a non-Jewish religion. In other words, a new nation was being born, not a nation with geo-political boundaries, but a spiritual kingdom that has spread until there is no corner of the world where its citizens are not found - the kingdom of God.

November 13 The Man Dressed in Linen (H)

I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. Daniel 10:5-6.

There is a striking similarity between Daniel's vision and John's vision of Revelation1:14-15. Both Daniel and John note the garment, both note a golden belt or sash, both note the fiery eyes, both see His feet looking like polished bronze, and both record the resonance of His voice. Furthermore, both collapse cataleptic during the vision. Daniel describes Him as a man; John knows it is Jesus because He says, *"I am He who lives and was dead' I am alive forevermore"* (v18). In both cases the purpose of the vision is the same; Daniel is told the vision is for the time of the end (v.14). John is told to write what is to come to pass in the future.

The difference lies in the location: Daniel initially does not say where 'the man' was, but in 12:5 says He was upon or above the waters of the River Hidekkel (Tigris). John saw Jesus walking among the candlesticks of the temple which suggests He is performing His High Priestly mediatory role in heaven. Therefore Daniel's 'man' was presumably also dressed in priestly attire, and, although not in the temple, was above the river between heaven and earth, between God and man, a place of mediation, lifted up, just as He was on the Cross.

We may never have the privilege of seeing Christ the way Daniel and John did. Yet both were given the privilege in order to share what they had seen with others. Because of the faithfulness of these two men we have the books of Daniel and Revelation, two great lights to shine before the feet of those who must tread the difficult paths of the last days.

November 14 The Prince of the Covenant (D)

There shall arise in his place one who imposes taxes on the glorious kingdom; but within a few days he shall be destroyed, but not in anger or in battle. And in his place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honour of royalty... With the force of a flood they shall be swept away from before him and be broken, and also the prince of the covenant. Daniel 11:20-22 NKJV[59].

Daniel 11 gives an outline of history as it concerns God's people from the end of the Persian Empire until the time of the end (Daniel 12:1-3). It can be easy to get lost in the detail, and because of that there are varying interpretations of the detail. However, there are, scattered throughout the passage, references to the 'glorious land' and the 'prince of the covenant' that act as guideposts along the way. Today's reading is such a passage. Verse 20 tells of one who will *'impose taxes on the glorious kingdom'*. This refers to Augustus Caesar who did just such a thing at the time Christ was born (Luke 2:1). In AD14 he died in his bed, and was replaced by the unpopular Tiberius Caesar who ruled until 37AD. And of course, it was during Tiberius' reign that Jesus, the Prince of the Covenant, was 'broken' on Calvary in 31AD.

It surely must give us great confidence in God that He knows every detail of the future. For most of us, our fears are of the unknown. But with God there is no unknown; there is nothing that can happen to us that He has not first measured. A BBC radio program once gave the following broadcast: "Before putting out to sea, it is the custom in a certain East Coast port, for the captain to call his men around him and ask: - 'Are we all here?' And the men reply, 'Yes, Sir, and in God's care'. 'Is there anything then to be afraid of?' asks the Captain – and the answer rings out: - 'No, Sir, there is nothing'; - And so, they put out to sea, once again".[60]

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[59] My reason for interpreting the passage the way I have is because of the similarity between this passage and Daniel 9:25-27 in which the 'Messiah the Prince' makes a covenant, and hence is identified as the Prince of the Covenant of 11:22. Daniel 9:26 also refers to a destructive flood. Therefore I believe Daniel 11 should be interpreted in the light of Daniel 9.

[60] Quoted in Valentine's Helpful Thoughts Postcards, Valentine & Sons Ltd. Dundee and London.

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. Daniel 12:1.

That time refers to the last six verses of Chapter 11. In that those six verses speak of the time of the end, as do the first three of Chapter 12, we are safe in accepting that the entire passage is still future. Although theologians will debate about the identity of Michael, most commentators recognise that it is none other than the One who is also our High Priest, our King, and the great Prophet, Jesus Christ. He is also the great Warrior who goes to battle against Satan (Revelation 12:7).

We normally picture Christ seated "*at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven"* (Hebrews 8:1). Yet there are times when Jesus is seen standing. One time is found in Acts 7:55-56 where Stephen is facing the barrage of rocks that will end his life. His last sight, and his last words, are of Jesus whom he sees standing by the throne of God. The death of the first Christian martyr is an event that has brought Jesus to His feet.[61] There have been many since Stephen who have sealed their love for the Word of God with their blood. Did Jesus stand for them too?

Yet He will stand again. The events to take place on the earth at that time are the zenith of human history. At that time the events of Daniel 11:40-45 will have taken place and the kings of the earth will have marshalled their forces for what will turn out to be Armageddon – even though they may not as yet be aware of it. Then a time of trouble, such as there has never been, is to come upon the earth. Then is the time for the Prince of Peace to deliver all those whose names are found in the Book of Life.

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[61] It is also the time that marks the end of the seventieth week of Daniel 9:25-27. Christ was anointed in AD 31, was 'cut off' in the middle of the week, i.e. after 3 ½ years, leaving a further 3 ½ years to complete the last week. It is the strong view of this writer that the first Christian martyrdom was the event that marked the end of the seventy weeks, and may also have added to the occasion that caused Christ to stand. From this time onwards the Gospel would go to the Gentiles as evidenced by Peter's vision of Acts 10 and 11.

November 16 **Of No Reputation (EG)**

The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Hosea 3:1-2.

God sure finds some novel ways to illustrate His relationship with us! But then, we take some reaching. The Israelites had forgotten all their promises to live for God, had repeatedly worshipped other gods, and had broken every commandment they were given through Moses. They were, in fact, just like a harlot selling herself to any and every man who would pay the price, and nothing God did or said to bring them back to Him seemed to get the message across. Enter Hosea!

Hosea, whose name, *Salvation*, is very close to the Hebrew form of *Jesus*, is told to do something that is going to destroy his reputation and bring nothing but heartache. How does society view a man who marries a sex worker while she is still practicing her profession? He must be her pimp, they assume. Not only was Hosea told to marry Gomer and have children through her, he was told to love her. And he did exactly as God told him to do. Yet, no sooner had he married her than she was off into the arms of other men. The poor man must have agonised before God over this situation. It would have been so easy to walk away, but how could he when he loved her? God told him what to do: Go pay out her new pimp and bring her home. And that's just what he did.

Nowadays it is quite common to hear people ridiculing Christianity for having a God who came to the world as a man, allegedly an illegitimate one, in order to allow Himself to be crucified by those He came to save. "What kind of a god does that?" they laugh. They don't understand His love. That is what Hosea and Gomer are all about - and we are Gomer.

November 17 **Torn to Pieces (H)**

Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence. Hosea 6:1-2.

It would be helpful if Matthew had written of the resurrection, "...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying 'on the third day He will be restored to us '". Then we would know for sure that today's reading is Messianic. But he didn't and we don't.

The passage is Israel's response to God's ultimatum of Chapter 5. God, in effect says, "Okay, if that's the way you want it, then I'm going home, until you come looking for me." Now Israel has considered the matter, and decided that God offers a much better deal than the Assyrians, for although *"He has torn us to pieces...He will heal us..."*

He has torn us to pieces...: is it really God who does bad stuff to us? Pilate said to Jesus, *"Don't you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"* (John 19:10). Jesus replied, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"* (v. 11). He was answering this question; even if our actions do bring about our suffering, it is ultimately God who has the power to allow it or prevent it.

The story of Israel and the story of Jesus are closely intertwined so that the experience of one is the experience of the other. Israel's experiences as a people anticipate the experiences of the Messiah. Out of Egypt, through the water, into the wilderness, on to Calvary. Now Israel faces annihilation as a people for their sins, and Jesus must face Calvary, not for His sins, but for ours. After two days He will revive; on the third day He will be restored that He may ever live in God's presence. And because of Him, so will all who are Israel.

November 18 **Firstborn (H)**

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. Hosea 11:1.

In today's reading God calls the nation of Israel His son, just as when He had sent Moses back to Egypt He instructed the hesitant ex-prince to say to Pharaoh, *"Thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My firstborn"* (Exodus 4:22).

The expression *firstborn* has a deeper meaning in the Bible than simply the eldest sibling; it also means the one who will receive the inheritance, or birthright, even if he is not the eldest child. The firstborn, in this sense, is also referred to as 'only begotten' even when other siblings exist. For example, we read in Hebrews 11:17: "*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son".* Here Isaac is regarded as the only child born to Abraham even though Ishmael was his older brother by several years. Similarly Isaac's firstborn son was Jacob, even though Esau was the first twin delivered.

Israel is God's firstborn, whom He calls out of Egypt. Matthew, who clearly understands that the history of Israel prefigures the life of Messiah, writes, "*When he* [Joseph] *arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son'"* (Matthew 2:14-15). The writer of Hebrews also testifies that Jesus is God's firstborn Son, for he writes of Him: "*And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'"* (Heb 1:6). The good news is that if Jesus is the firstborn, others will follow. As Paul writes, "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Roman 8:29-31).

November 19 **The Saviour (AH)**

But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Saviour except me. Hosea 13:4

God is our only Saviour. We have run up against similar words in the book of Isaiah. If an idea is repeated by different authors, it must be important. Therefore we must also look at it again. The word 'LORD' is capitalised, which means that the Hebrew is YHWH or *Jehovah.* Jehovah alone is our Saviour; there is no other.

So if Jehovah alone is our Saviour, who is Jesus? When brought to interrogation, Peter boldly proclaimed Jesus using these words: "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). So Jesus is also our only Saviour. How can they both be only Saviours? We are left with only two alternatives; either Jesus is an imposter, or He is Jehovah.

The religious authorities were incensed at Peter's words; blasphemy – Jesus was an imposter. But the people saw things differently. The record continues: "*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus*" (v. 13).

They took note that the disciples had been with Jesus. That is a very telling statement. When the disciples first joined Jesus they were selfish, argumentative, bigoted and self-righteous. Now they were noble and courageous, infused with love for God and man. They had met the Saviour, and you can't meet the Saviour and remain the same. Their Saviour is also our Saviour, and it is His purpose that we also become changed so that when people see us they will take note that we have been with Jesus. That is the work of a Saviour.

November 20 The Judge of Mankind (BH)

Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow— so great is their wickedness! Joel 3:12-13.

This passage is strongly alluded to in Revelation 14:14-20, the grand description of Christ's return on the clouds of heaven to gather the saved and to judge the unsaved. Today's reading, although locally applying to the threat of an unspecified invasion, also has a distinct end-time message. There is no known place called the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but because the word means 'God Judges' it is equally possible that it could have been translated as 'the Valley of God's Judgment'.

Jesus made a claim about Himself that infuriated His enemies, and may still rile some people today. He claimed to be the Judge of mankind! He said, *"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son….I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live….Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out— those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned*" (John 5:22-27). When this event takes place the whole world will be gathered at the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Jesus once told a powerful parable concerning this very scene; you can read it in Matthew 25. It tells of how, when He returns to 'the Valley of Jehoshaphat', He will separate us into two groups, the sheep and the goats. There will be some major surprises that day - Jesus does not judge as we judge - for man looks at the outward appearance, but God reads the heart (1Samuel 16:7). We shall learn more about this enigmatic scene when we look at Joel's next words tomorrow.

November 21 The Valley of Decision (H)

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. Joel 3:14-16.

Back in Leviticus 23:23-24 we learnt about the Feast of Trumpets, the warning about the soon arrival of the Day of Atonement – *Yom Kippur*, Judgment Day. Those who had already decided to obey God were safely recorded in the Book of Life, but the multitudes who were in the valley of decision had ten days to get themselves right with God before the books were closed and the unbelievers cut off. Serious stuff, this judgment, for those who still have to decide!

Yesterday we saw the connection between Joel 3 and Revelation 14. We see it again today; Revelation 14:6-12 reveals God's final warning before the day when Christ shall judge the world. Now the inhabitants of Planet Earth find themselves in a deep, wide valley, the valley of decision, which leaves no middle ground for compromise. All must choose to worship Him who created the earth, or him who arrogated it to himself. This is why the valley: it symbolises a call to *"worship Him who created the heavens and the earth"* just at the time when the world has rejected Creation for a godless, hopeless, substitute. It is no coincidence that Revelation 14:7 alludes to the fourth Commandment at just such a time as this, for it is the one place in the Bible that tells us to keep the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation. God is not calling us to 'get religion'; not calling us back to any belief system we care to choose; He is calling us to worship the Creator. The end-time issue is one of worship, whether to worship the God of the Bible, or the beast of Revelation 13, and there is a deep valley between the two.

On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord.... Amos 9:11-12 NKJV.

The disciples were flummoxed. The Holy Spirit was working mightily among the people and the church was growing rapidly. The difficulty was that many of these converts were Gentiles, and the church leaders, being Jews, had no idea how to cross the cultural and religious barriers so firmly in place between Jew and Gentile. Were Gentile Christians to become Jewish Christians? Should they be circumcised? Should they have unsympathetic Jewish priests examine their skin infections and hope to be declared clean? The Holy Spirit seemed silent on the matter, seemingly content to allow the disciples to learn to use the Scriptures to guide them through this and the many other issues that would surely face them.

Finally the Apostles came to a conclusion: God has told us, they said, (in Amos 9:11-12) that He will raise up Gentiles to bear His name among the nations. Now we have seen the Lord pouring out His Spirit on them even though they are uncircumcised. Therefore let us not burden them with having to follow all these regulations that are too much even for us. Let us therefore write to them telling them only to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood (see Acts 15:1-21).

These regulations are, in fact, a part of the Holiness Code[62] found in Leviticus 17 and 18. They tell us that holiness is required of Christians as well as Jews. Had they not adopted these guidelines, Gentile Christians would have appeared no different from the pagans around them. The same applies today: shall we who profess Christ blend with the world so that neither God nor man can tell the difference? God forbid!

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[62] The expression 'Holiness Code' is not found in Scripture, but is a name given by theologians to Leviticus 17-26, which is a synopsis of the essential conduct God requires of His people. That Acts 15 summarises Leviticus 17 and 18 as a requirement for Gentiles is a strong indication that God still requires holiness from all believers.

You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among [the Jews] *who escaped. Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress. For the day of the Lord upon all nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you. Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.* Obadiah 1:14-15 (NKJV).

God chastens those He loves, and He holds in reserve the instruments He will use to correct His people when they go astray. Often the instrument is gentle, but there are times when He sees the need for something more decisive. In today's case it is the Edomites whom God has used to correct a rebellious nation that has completely turned its back on Him. Now these descendants of Israel's brother, Esau, have done as God bid them, but the merciless hatred with which they did it, and the obvious enjoyment they found in doing it, has brought God's judgment upon them.

Does God still use one nation to chastise another? He may well do so. Can He use terrorist groups to bring back to God a civilisation that had once lived by the Bible? He certainly can; but we need to use caution when dealing with issues we do not fully understand.

Obadiah sees a bigger picture in God's dealings with the Edomites; he reminds them that when God used them to reprimand Israel, they were to have done it in the spirit of God – in humility and mercy. When God chastens, He does so with tears. The Edomites abused the privilege of being God's right hand, and now they have to understand that there will come a day when all nations, including them, will be judged.

The day of the Lord is near; soon Jesus will return to judge the nations. The prophets have spoken it. If today's terrorists are God's instrument to bring us to repentance, then they too will be judged with the same measure they have used to judge us.

November 24 **Into the Abyss (EH)**

To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. Jonah 2:6.

The key word in the first half of the book of Jonah is 'down', and today's reading is Jonah's nadir, the roots of the mountains, or as the Septuagint says, the *abyss*. There is no place lower. After making his decision to run away from God, Jonah sinks lower, ever lower: *down* to Joppa (1:3), *down* into the hold of the ship (1:5), into the sea (1:15), into the depths (2:3), *down* into the roots of the mountains (2:6).

Jonah remained in the abyss for three days, and while there he did what he might well have done much earlier: he prayed. He had run from God, and now he was coming back to God; he had gone down, now he was coming up; up from the depths of the pit (2:6), his prayer *rose* to God's holy temple (2:7), and he was returned to dry land (2:10).

Jesus did not mention all this when He used Jonah to illustrate His pending death; He simply said, "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:40). He could also have spoken of Jonah's despair, but that was to be His experience, not ours. Yet Jonah's Gethsemane well anticipates Jesus' anguish as He took upon Himself the sins of the world; "*My soul is sorrowful to the point of death",* lamented Jesus (Matthew 26:38*). "From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help",* cried Jonah (2:2). *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"* lamented Jesus (Mark 15:34). *"I have been banished from your sight"*, complained Jonah (2:4). We all have times when we are in the pit, especially when we are running from God. Then we can always say with Jonah*, "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple* (2:7).

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Micah 4:1-2.

Isaiah gave us a wise principle for Bible study: "*Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little…"* (Isaiah 28:9-10 KJV). The best way to understand the message of the Bible is to take all the passages one can find on a subject and put them together in the way one works on a section of jigsaw puzzle. We can apply this principle to today's reading because much is said about God's holy mountain. Here is a contribution from Joel: "*So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy*…" (Joel 3:17 KJV).

Another reference is found in Daniel 2 in a passage we have already looked at which tells of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a rock 'not made with human hands' that becomes a great mountain after destroying the empires of the world. This is the same mountain, and it is further mentioned in Ezekiel 40:2 and Revelation 21:10 where both prophets are taken to a great mountain to see the city of God. According to Ezekiel the holy city is on the south side of the mountain just as Jerusalem lies just south of Mt. Moriah, the temple site. According to John, "*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp".* (Rev. 21:23). From these verses we learn that the mountain has a great city upon it, and the city is lit by the glory of Jesus.

November 26 **Stricken (H)**

Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. Micah 5:1

To strike someone on the cheek, or to slap them with open palm, was considered a gross insult. Job wrote, "*Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me"* (Job 16:10). Jeremiah wrote, "*Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace".* (Lamentations 3:30). The context for today's reading is the threat of invasion by Assyria which, due to the king's reforms, was averted at the last minute. Judah's ruler at the time was the faithful Hezekiah, and he would have certainly been slapped on the cheek by Sennacherib had the invasion taken place.

Sadly for Judah, Hezekiah's successors did not hold to his reforms. As a result the threatened invasion took place one hundred years later when, in 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the city, including Solomon's temple, and took the inhabitants captive to their own land. Yet the prophecy has a wider fulfilment. In fact, Micah's words become pointedly messianic at this point leaving no doubt that he was referring to One greater than Hezekiah. He was talking of One who has been Ruler from old, from everlasting. This is the one whose cheek would be struck. And it was! Matthew records, *"Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophesy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"* (Matthew 26:67).

As Hezekiah was surrounded by an army seeking his destruction, so Jesus was surrounded by an enemy, led by Satan himself, who sought, at all costs, to rid the world of its King. Hezekiah escaped, but Jesus could not, for it is only with His stripes that we can be healed. And He wanted, at all costs, that we be healed.

November 27 **Out of Bethlehem (D)**

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting. Micah 5:2 NKJV.

There are two Bethlehems in the Holy land, the other being further north in Zebulun. Micah specifically stated that it was the one in Judah from which the Messiah would come. The prophecies have become more and more specific over the centuries; every successive messianic prophet has added further detail to that first fuzzy promise of Genesis 3:15. Now, as we come toward the close of God's written communication with Israel, He adds the final information that makes it impossible for them not to be prepared for His arrival.

In retrospect it is difficult to understand why Bethlehem was not the centre of attraction during the year of Messiah's birth; Daniel has specified when it would happen, and Micah where. Those who look for Christ's return would love to have that much information about His second advent. Those who have assumed to know, and have gone out to meet Him, have paid the price for their mistake. Yet surely, those who are looking for Christ's return and proclaiming it, are those heaven looks down upon with the greatest satisfaction – better mistaken than unconcerned.

God is infinitely wise. All He does, or does not do, plays a part in His great plan of salvation. Perhaps it is because He wants us to study the Scriptures that He hides truth behind doors and curtains. Some doors do not open without keys, and some curtains need drawstrings. The keys and drawstrings of course are not handed to us on a plate, but are to be found in the Scriptures themselves: "*precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little"* (Isaiah 28:10).

November 28 The Son of the Young Woman (D)

Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. Micah 5:3.

This prophecy is described by one commentator[63] as "...the most important single prophecy in the Old Testament". Micah's prophecies are better understood when it is remembered that he and Isaiah were contemporaries and wrote on very similar themes. In fact, in some cases, their words are identical, for example Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4. Therefore today's reading must be read in the context of Isaiah 7:14, "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel".* With the ten tribes scattered, and Judah soon to be taken captive, Israel certainly appeared abandoned, for there was no word of the Lord in the land from the time of Malachi until the day John the Baptist came to proclaim the coming Messiah. Malachi said concerning John, "*He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents"* (4:6) so that, as Micah writes, "*the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites"*.

Micah's words, "*the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites",* have a wider meaning: As the ten tribes were scattered at the fall of Samaria, so with the birth of the Son, there was to come a great rebuilding of Israel, not in a physical sense, but as a spiritual nation. Paul the Apostle put it like this: "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts…So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The Messiah's Israel is a nation made up from all peoples of the world, every continent and every nation, every colour and every culture, every language and every background. From all times and all places, men, women and children will gather before the Son, and they will be Israel.

[63] Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Micah 5:1-6.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. Micah 5:4.

We tend to think that people living in Bible days had no awareness of the nations far from their immediate borders. In fact that is not the case. There is much evidence to suggest that trade between the Middle-east and China was well established by the time of Daniel.[64] This means that when Micah wrote of the Messiah's greatness reaching the ends of the earth, his readers understood him to be intending more than just their immediate world. If that is the case it is also very probable that the words of the prophets, especially those of Daniel, were also known by men such as Confucius and Buddha. We have to think big when we read the Bible.

It had always been God's intention that His knowledge should cover the earth. As Nile dwellers traded regularly with nations far and near, travellers would pass through glorious Israel, a jewel of territory inhabited by a holy people blessed *'above all nations of the earth'* because they *'obeyed the voice of the Lord their God'* (Deuteronomy 28). As these traders saw this great nation, blessed in field and city, in basket and kneading trough, in crop and herd, they too wanted to worship the God of Israel. And that was just the way God wanted it. That way the whole world would *become "filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"* (Isaiah 11:9).

Micah chooses to paint this utopian scene not in military or nationalistic terms, but in a pastoral setting. The ruler of this holy world is a Shepherd who stands lovingly among His flock, leaning upon His staff, looking proudly upon them revelling in their contentedness and their enjoyment of His presence. He is the Good Shepherd and He knows His sheep and they know His voice.

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[64] See for example Gordon, *World Healers*, p54. Quoted in Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant*, Pacific Press, 1944, Chap. 21, *Adam and the Church in China*,

November 30 **The Battle of Calvary (H)**

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that brings good tidings, of him that publishes peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows; for Belial shall no longer pass through thee; he is utterly cut off. Nahum 1:15 Jubilee Bible 2000.

The good tidings, in this context, is the news brought to the people of Judah that their nemesis, Nineveh, capital of Assyria, has been destroyed. Now they can perform their temple sacrifices and worship in peace because their enemy, here called Belial, shall never come back to invade them.

This passage, like so many others given by the prophets, has a dual application. It looks to a day when tireless feet upon distant mountains will bear the good tidings of the Gospel to the farthest corners of the earth. The Gospel is good news because like the message of Nahum, it tells the world that Satan, also called Belial in 2Corinthians 6:15, will one day no longer pass through the land, but will be utterly cut off.

Soldiers enter military campaigns without any idea of the outcome - for themselves or for their army. They know that some will fall in battle, but they don't know which of them it will be. Uncertainty and fear are their constant companions, even though desperation gives birth to acts of the greatest heroism. Christian warfare is different, we cannot avoid it because the enemy is bent on our destruction whether we fight or not. Our enemy is our sinful self, and our warfare is against our carnal nature. But we have an advantage over the infantryman; our Commander has already won the war at the Battle of Calvary. Now only the Battle of Self remains. It is a bitter struggle, but when surrounded we only need to call upon Jesus and victory is sure. Yes, the fight continues, but soon the mountains will bear the feet that bring the good news that Belial shall no longer pass through the land. How beautiful will be those feet in that day, how jubilant the mountains.

December 1 **Coming Soon (DH)**

For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. Habakkuk 2:3

Habakkuk's words were a serious warning to the people of Judah who had become so accustomed to hearing the "woe, woe, woe" of the doomsday prophets that their words just went in one ear and came out of the other. Besides, this supposed destruction never seemed to come. The prophets had become a part of the scenery, and life went on as usual. Therefore God sent Habakkuk to impress upon the people that what God says will happen *will* happen, and sooner rather than later.

Inspiration gives the same warning to readers of the New Testament: for decades now the word has been going out that the prophecies point to the imminent return of Christ. Yet the people say, *"Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation"* (2Peter 3:4). These people have a nominal belief in God, but have lost confidence in the Bible as His inspired Word. They are believers, but no longer live for the coming of Christ. Therefore, in order to remind them that the words of the twenty-first century prophets will also come to pass just as surely as did those of Habakkuk, Jesus has given them a parable about ten bridesmaids awaiting the arrival of the Groom. The story is simple, but buried within it is a message that should shock us into serious reflection about our standing with God: five church members, just like us, are denied entrance into the wedding. Why? Because their lights went out. Is that so very bad? Yes, because this Groom is not any groom, He is Christ, and this wedding is not any wedding, it the Wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). Now we are in the waiting time, and the Bridegroom knows our danger. He instructs us to "*Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour* (Matthew 25:13)."

December 2 Of Faith, Watching, and Shrinking Back (G)

Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith. Habakkuk 2:4.

Today's reading continues from yesterday when we saw that even though Christ's return appears to be delayed – people have been preaching it for two thousand years and still He has not come – He will come in His time. In today's verse, Habakkuk reveals how we are to live during the waiting time. *"The just",* he writes, *"shall live by his faith"*. Well, that doesn't seem very helpful, it just sounds like a theological cliché. What does it mean? When Jesus told the story of the bridesmaids, He also concluded with some cryptic advice, "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour".* Watch for what? So many questions! There must be a common thread between Jesus' words and Habakkuk's. Both are founded upon a level of belief that spurs to action: not belief *about* God, but belief *in* God. In the original languages of the Bible, the word for 'faith' is the same as for 'belief. Therefore, those who await the coming of the Lord will live according to their belief, they will not be like chameleons, which change their colour to suit their environment, they will remain steadfast in their religion

The writer of the book of Hebrews also refers to Habakkuk's tarrying time, and also follows it with instruction on how to live during the wait. His words however, need no interpretation, they are straight to the point: *"we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved"* (Hebrews 10:39).

So, living by faith means believing, keeping watch means observing the signs of the times, and not shrinking back means just that. This is no casual religion being described here; it requires spiritual muscle. But behind it all is a promise: He who is coming will come, and will not tarry; that is what buoys us up.

December 3 The Great Day of the Lord (DH)

The great day of the LORD is near— near and coming quickly….That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. Zephaniah 1:14-16.

Most of the passages we have looked at allude to the first advent of Christ. But, of course, His second advent also qualifies for inclusion in this book, and that is what today's reading is also about. In fact today's text is a strong echo of Revelation 6:15-17, which concerns the sixth seal, and reads: *"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?""*

There are five events described under the sixth seal: a great earthquake, the darkening of the sun, the moon becoming as blood, and the stars falling from heaven. These are followed by the heavens unrolling, just as a tightly rolled scroll or picture does when it is released, and causes catastrophic movement of the continents and islands.

Have these events occurred yet? If not, they must surely occur soon, for the traumatised earth is more than ready for them. The first four occurred locally in dramatic fashion during the 18th and 19th Centuries, and could easily occur again. It is only the final event, the unrolling of the heavens that has not happened yet.[65]

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[65] On November 1, 1755 an earthquake, epicentred in Lisbon, Portugal rocked most of the known world, being felt as far away as the West Indies Twenty-five years later on May 19, 1780 occurred what became known as 'the dark day' when, during mid-morning, night appeared to fall over the north-eastern United States for several hours. That night the full moon, when it appeared, was reddish in colour. Finally, on November 13, 1833, occurred the greatest meteor shower ever witnessed by man. Again, it occurred over the north-eastern United States, the 'burned over district' in which was a major concentration of Gospel activity.

...The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Zephaniah 3:14-17.

When we looked at the annual sanctuary festivals, we found the last of them, the Feast of Tabernacles, to be a time when the people were to rejoice in God's coming to dwell with mankind. For this reason many Christians believe that it was at the time of this festival that Jesus was born, and not on the traditional mid-winter date, for the Saviour's birth too was a time of *"glad tidings of great joy to all people"* (Luke 2:10) The Feast of Tabernacles was observed soon after the Day of Atonement in which sin was ceremonially removed from the camp of Israel reconciling God with His people. The Feast of Tabernacles prefigured the time when sin and sinners will be no more, when Satan and his legions of evil will no longer exist, and temptation and failure, sickness and death, will be things of the past.

This is the picture painted by Zephaniah: warnings of judgment yes, but infused with hope for the day when those who heed the warnings will rejoice at the coming of their King, when fear will never again haunt them. That will be such a blessed day that the Lord Himself will rejoice with singing.

Today our world is corrupt. The faithful are ridiculed by the godless, maligned by media and politicians, discriminated against by bigots, and persecuted by extremists. But this will not last forever; soon the Lord Jesus will come to save His people. On that day there will be the singing in the air: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"* (Luke 2:13-14). And the Lord Himself will lead the singing.

December 5 The Glory of the Temple (BD)

'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace, ' declares the Lord Almighty. Haggai 2:9

Perhaps the most provocative claim Jesus ever made about Himself was that He was greater than the temple, the dwelling place of God on earth (Matthew 12:6). King Solomon, the architect and builder of the original temple, wanted it to be the most magnificent of all buildings, fit for the God of the universe – and it was. But after its destruction by the Babylonians, those who first saw its replacement wept as they remembered its former glory. Now the prophet Haggai, who was among them, assured them that this temple, although inferior in construction, would be more glorious than its predecessor.

Appropriate though it was to make God's house as magnificent as possible, it was not its magnificence that conferred the measure of its glory. What made the 'present house' greater was that the Messiah would grace it with His presence. Not just a royal visit, but to mingle with the worshippers, to teach, to preach and to heal. This was the true work of the temple.

And something else too! While the temple had the outward appearance of beauty and majesty, the religious leaders had allowed it to become inwardly corrupt. Indeed their own dishonest dealings had brought shame upon what God had intended to bring glory. When Jesus entered the temple and saw that it had been turned into a bazaar, He immediately set about to restore it to its true purpose (Mark 11). Truly the temple was never more glorious than when Christ sat among the worshippers sharing with them God's kingdom; when they came in pain and left with joyful step; when they came burdened with sin left with peaceful heart; when people could at last say, *"I was glad when they said unto me 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'"* (Psalm 122:1 KJV).

December 6 **The Signet Ring (E)**

"On that day," declares the Lord Almighty, "I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel," declares the Lord, "and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the Lord Almighty." Haggai 2:23.

After the fall of Babylon, King Cyrus appointed Zerubbabel, grandson of King Jehoiachin, to be governor of Judea, and commissioned him to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple there. Being a direct descendant of King David, Zerubbabel is therefore also a part of the pedigree of the Messiah to come.

Haggai's words, *On that day*, tell us that this passage has a wider significance than to Zerubbabel alone. 'That day' is 'the day of the Lord', an event that has not yet come in all its fullness. Therefore, while God did set apart Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel's authority and work anticipated One who would come to build a greater temple, a temple that the Apostle Paul would later describe in these terms: "...*do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?"* (1Corinthians 6:19). In other words, the temple built by the Antitypical Zerubbabel is not made with bricks and mortar, but by the Spirit of God in the hearts of believers.

God told Zerubbabel he would be "*like my signet ring".* He was not the Signet Ring, but he was like the Signet Ring, the builder of God's house. Who is God's Signet Ring? Who has the authority to wear this ring and impress it into the wax? Jesus says to His followers, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28: 18-20). Jesus is the Signet Ring.

December 7 Behold I Am Coming Soon (DH)

Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you, declares the LORD. Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. Zechariah 2:10-11.

Had the Israelites accepted Christ these words may have been fulfilled two thousand years ago. Jesus came to live with them, but the authorities, threatened by His popularity, had Him put to death. Nevertheless, when God makes a promise He keeps it, and so the words of today's reading will still come to pass. In fact the promise is repeated in Revelation 21:3, "*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God".*

The book of Revelation has much to say about God coming to dwell among us. The letters to the seven churches, which outline the unfolding story of the Church between the two advents of Christ, contain multiple hints and warnings of His approaching return. The letter to the church in Philadelphia contains this hope-inspiring promise: "*I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown"* (3:11). To history's last church, Laodicea, a church Jesus finds quite distasteful because, like the foolish virgins of Matthew 25, it prefers to rest content in its supposed spiritual wealth, He says, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock"* (3:20).

Revelation's message is the last written word given to the Church. In its final pages we see the urgency in Jesus' words as He warns again and again of the closeness of His coming. Three times in the last chapter He mentions it, and even the very last words of the book are these: *"Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus".*

December 8 **The High Priest (E)**

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. Zechariah 3:1.

Joshua was the High Priest who accompanied Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Once completed, he also oversaw the restoration of the temple services and sacrifices. He, in the spirit of Aaron before him, established post-exile worship in Israel. As Aaron had been a Christ-type who prefigured the heavenly High Priest, Mediator of a *"better covenant"* (Hebrews 8:6), so Joshua, or Jeshua as he is sometimes called, bore the same name as Jesus who is now our heavenly High Priest seated "*at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man* (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Yet, like his forebear, Joshua was also not without sin. Ezra 10:18 records that Joshua had not stopped his sons (who would also become priests) from marrying pagan idol worshippers. This was an offence to God because the priestly line was to be kept pure, and the offspring of a marriage between a priest and a pagan would compromise the purity of the priesthood. That is why Satan was accusing Joshua.

Satan, whose name means *Accuser*, ever seeks to present God with our sinfulness. He claims that we must perish eternally for our sins because corruption has no place in heaven. He is correct about that, but being the father of hypocrites, forgets that it was he who is ultimately responsible for all corruption. Now he says, in effect, "If I'm not allowed there, no-one else will be there either."

Yes, Satan is correct that the sinner cannot enter heaven. But heaven has a contingency to save Joshua which we shall learn about in the days to come.

December 9 **The Reprover (GH)**

The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Zechariah 3:2.

Zechariah 3 is a succinct revelation of the warfare going on behind the curtain that separates earth from heaven. As with the first two chapters of Job, we can learn much from this chapter about this combat. One thing we learn is the difference between accusing and rebuking. God rebukes the sin, but never accuses the sinner. To accuse is to condemn, and the Angel of the Lord, Jesus, will never condemn the penitent sinner. *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:17). When we come under the condemnation of others, He will say only, *"Go now and leave your life of sin"* (see John 8).

This is not the only time Jesus rebuked Satan; Jude 9 says, *"But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"* Moses sinned in striking the rock the second time – The Rock which was Christ was to be struck only once. As a result Moses was to die without entering the Promised Land. Yet God had something greater planned for Moses. This faithful Christ-type was to be raised from death in anticipation of Christ's own resurrection. That is something Satan did not want for it suited his scheme to have Jesus in the tomb forever. So the wretch contended with the Lord over Moses' body just as he later did over Joshua the high priest.

It is never our place to make accusation against others; that is Satan's work, not ours. If a church member (or anybody for that matter) sins, we have been instructed what to do: *"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him"* (Luke 17:3).

December 10 **The Clothier GH)**

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Zechariah 3:3-4.

Why did God take away Joshua's sin? Because he had repented and taken an oath to correct the problem of the pagan wives (Ezra 10). This passage teaches an important lesson: we tend to think that forgiven sin is just covered by the robes of Christ's righteousness. This is not quite the case. Our sins must first be removed before the 'rich garments' can be placed upon us. Joshua's sin brought dishonour upon heaven. Yet when he repented, the Angel of the Lord instructed His helpers to remove Joshua's filthy garments before the new ones could be put on. His sin was not just forgiven; it was entirely removed – as though it had never happened.

We see an example of this in 1Kings 14:8 where God says to Jeroboam*, "...you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes."* There is no mention of the Uriah incident because David had repented of it. The sin had been forever removed, even from God's memory. Too often when we confess our sins we fail to move on. We keep beating ourselves up over what God has long forgotten.

Joshua's experience is promised to all who repent. "*He who overcomes will…be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels…they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple"* (Revelation 3:5, 7:14-15). Just like Joshua the high priest.

Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. Zechariah 3:8.

It was Isaiah who first likened the Messiah to a Branch (4:2). Is a branch just a limb making up part of a tree? Not to Isaiah. He pictured the Messiah as a fruit-laden bough so large that its foliage provided cover, shelter, and protection for all Israel. Its fruit was the nobility and glory of the redeemed, a branch of the Tree of Life.

Today's reading has a similar suggestion; Joshua has associates who are symbolic of things to come. What could this mean? Given that Joshua was high priest, it is reasonable to suppose that his associates seated before him are priests who also serve in the temple. They, the Lord says, are symbolic of things to come. What things to come? The answer to that reveals a lot about God's original plan for mankind. It all starts in Exodus 19 where God is instructing Moses to explain to the people what He expects from them as citizens of His Holy Kingdom: *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (v. 5-6).

So God wants His people to be priests. Theologians today call it the priesthood of all believers. What is a priest? Someone who represents the people before God (as opposed to a prophet who represents God before the people). Why a nation of priests? Maybe because in the distant reaches of the universe are worlds whose inhabitants, like the ninety-nine sheep still in the fold, have not fallen into sin. Maybe in some way as yet not understood, the redeemed will act as God's ambassadors to these blessed people. Revelation repeats the promise three times (1:6, 5:10, 20:6); the redeemed are priests of God forever; they are what are to come.

December 12 **The King-Priest (AD)**

…Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two. Zechariah 6:12-13.

In ancient Israel it was a king who built the temple. King Solomon took direct charge and control of the construction of a building intended as a place of sacrifice and worship. To post-modern minds such a merging of church and state would be unacceptable. Yet Solomon was a Christ-type, and today's reading tells us that the Branch, whom we know to be Christ the King, will build the temple of the Lord.

Today's passage also tells us that the Branch will be clothed in majesty and rule on His throne. In other words, the Branch is a King. Yet, we are told, He will be a priest on His throne. Whoever heard of a priest sitting on a throne? In Israel the two roles, priest and king were kept very separate. In fact when kings (Saul and Uzziah) took it upon themselves to act as priests, retribution was swift. So how can Jesus rule on the throne as both King and Priest? Because He is of a different Order (see January 28).

To many minds, a king acting as a priest (or vice-versa) has a serious conflict of interest. A king has to enact and enforce laws, and has to administer punishment to offenders. A priest, on the other hand, has to intercede on behalf of the offender. Therefore the two roles are incompatible. Man has insufficient wisdom to know when to administer divine justice and when to offer divine mercy. Only a divine King/Priest can do that. Not only can Jesus do that but, as the reading says, there is complete harmony between the two. What a wonderful government it will be for the redeemed when they live under such a Man.

December 13 **The King Comes (CD)**

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9.

Attempts have been made over the centuries to try and explain this prophecy. What king ever entered a city on a donkey? What king ever entered bringing salvation? If we were to examine the kingly entries into Jerusalem from the time of Zechariah, we come up with some interesting names. The first, of course, was Alexander the Great – definitely not him. Then a couple of centuries later came Antiochus Epiphanes. Certainly not that terrorist. Then there was General Titus in AD70. Hardly! Then came the Ottomans. They were not renowned for coming peacefully on donkeys. The last 'king' to enter Jerusalem was British General Allenby in 1917 when he defeated the Ottomans. He was more likely to come on a tank than a donkey.

One nation to use the donkey for royal occasions was Israel. God had commanded the people not to build up cavalries (Deuteronomy 17:16). He also instructed them to hamstring horses captured in battle (Joshua 11:6). Could it be that a cavalry carries in the rider a feeling of autonomy that is not in harmony with the meekness God wants in his people at time of war? Is the humble donkey not more appropriate for 'a man after God's own heart'?

There was one King who entered Jerusalem on a donkey. Not only did He ride the donkey, but to bring the prophecy into complete fulfilment, He rode one that was 'a colt, the foal of a donkey', in other words one that had never been ridden before. What an amazing prophecy this is; no wonder people have looked for a way around it. There is no way around it. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled - lock, stock, and barrel.

December 14 Weeping over Jerusalem (D)

Open your doors, O Lebanon, That fire may devour your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, Because the mighty trees are ruined. Wail, O oaks of Bashan, For the thick forest has come down. There is the sound of wailing shepherds! For their glory is in ruins. There is the sound of roaring lions! For the pride of the Jordan is in ruins. Zechariah 11:1-3.

Parts of the book of Zechariah tell a prophetic story. Chapter 9 described the entry of the Messiah King into Jerusalem. Chapter 11 describes the rejection of the Messiah and God's final rejection of Israel as His chosen nation. As did Zechariah, so did Jesus mentally connect His entry into Jerusalem with the final destruction of the holy city. Even when He sat astride the donkey, tears flowed down His cheeks as He envisioned the devastation to come. Luke, recording Jesus' tearful words, writes "…*and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation"* (Luke 19:28-44).

Our reading today concerns Jerusalem and the temple rather than the Messiah. But Jesus saw in horrific vision the scene painted by Zechariah in which Roman flames brought down the magnificent timbers that had been used to build the temple. As the temple fell in ruins so did the glory and pride of Israel. In spite of this – no - because of this, when Jesus arrived in the city, His first act was to enter the temple and throw out the wheelers and dealers who had turned the house of God into a confused and corrupt market place. Zechariah saw that too, for he describes these people as those who sell their flocks and say*, "Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich"* (11:5) while at the same time cheating the poor worshippers with their sharp practices. God hates injustice, and one day He will bring it to an end just as tomorrow's reading describes His dealing with the corrupt leaders of Israel.

December 15 **The Broken Staff (H)**

So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock…In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh." Then I took my staff called Favour and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. Zech. 11:7-10.

Yesterday's reading saw the shepherds of Israel wailing over the loss of the temple. Shepherds normally bewail the loss of their sheep, but then, these shepherds didn't care much about sheep. Now the shepherds are dismissed and the Good Shepherd cares for the flock Himself. But the flock hates the Good Shepherd so much that He finally has to let the sheep go. So He broke His covenant with them and allowed them to fend for themselves until they finally fell into cannibalism.

This passage prophecies conditions in Israel after they rejected the Saviour. On the day Jesus died, the curtain of the temple ripped open revealing the Shekinah departed and the covenant broken. Finally, in AD 70, Jerusalem was besieged and the people reduced to eating their own kin.[66]

Today's text also describes the last days of human history when the inhabitants of the world will finally reject God. At that time the Shepherd will also say, "*Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile…*" (Revelation 22:11). At that time famine will also afflict the world so sorely that people will resort to eating one another.

But there is good news: the evening before He died, Jesus, knowing the covenant was soon to be broken, made a new covenant so that all who believe in Him will be covered by its blood. This covenant will stand forever, and never be broken; not by the Shepherd, nor by the sheep.

[66] Josephus, Antiquities, Book VI, Chapter V, Section 1

December 16 **Betrayed (CD)**

I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord. Zechariah 11:12-13.

Something else was going on at that Passover meal; one of the twelve men with Jesus had betrayed his Lord. Jesus was well aware of what Judas had done, yet He made no effort to expose him or to save Himself. In fact Jesus had just washed Judas' feet and shared the ordinances of the New Testament with him, all the while knowing exactly what the wretch was about to do.

Here lies a deep challenge for the follower of Christ; Jesus washed the disciples' feet, including those of Judas. Then He said*, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you"*(John 13:14-15). It was not just in the washing of feet that Jesus is our example, it is His wish that we imitate Him in all aspects of life, even in the way we deal with those who seek to hurt us. What does Jesus want to see in me when I am injured or under duress? Is it a moral indignation that demands my rights be met? Or does He want me to wash my adversary's feet? What an example is the religion of Jesus. Dare I follow?

Judas would have received forgiveness had he asked for it. Jesus knew the New Covenant must be ratified with His blood; if not because of Judas, then because of another. The life of Jesus had been worth just thirty pieces of silver to Judas, and they were a poor trade for the horror that came upon him after the fact. He threw the money back to the temple shepherds, but they laughed at him, and used it to buy a piece of land called the potter's field. Just as Zechariah said they would.

December 17 **Pierced (CD)**

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. Zechariah 12:10.

In today's reading God's words are quite strange. He says He has been pierced, and makes it clear from what follows that His piercing was fatal. Now what kind of god would say he had been fatally wounded? Why would God say that people will grieve over Him as one grieves over the death of an only child, the one in whom all the hopes and dreams of the parents were centred? For this reason some have thought He is speaking metaphorically, but what would the metaphor represent?

The solution comes in two forms: the change of pronoun from *me* to *him*, and the change of tense from past to future. God says in effect, "they pierced Me, and they will mourn for Him". This passage, as with others in the Hebrew Scriptures, reveals that God does not exist in isolation; He is a compound Being. Even the *Shema, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one"* (Deuteronomy 6:4), uses the compound one, *echad,* instead of the unique one, *yachid. Echad* is also used of Adam and Eve, that they shall become 'one flesh' (Genesis 2:24), two people, but one unit, not just in spirit, but also in the flesh; flesh and spirit united – exactly in the image of God.

The Apostle John knew this, for he fully understood that it was the Messiah, God's firstborn, who was pierced. When he saw the Roman soldier thrust a spear into Jesus' side, it was these words of Zechariah that came to his mind (John 19:37). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. When we accept Christ we also become *echad* with Him, and when we suffer, He suffers with us. When we mourn, He mourns with us. We sometimes hear people ask what God is doing when tragedy strikes. He is grieving too.

December 18 **The Fountain (D)**

On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. Zechariah 13:1.

When we start reading the Bible from the beginning of a chapter we often miss the context. Today's verse is a good example of this. Had those good men of the 15th Century AD, who added chapter and verse to the Bible, left 13:1 as a part of Chapter 12, we would have seen more easily that the fountain referred to above was opened on the day Messiah was pierced. Of course the fountain that cleanses from sin and impurity is the blood of Him who was pierced. The record says, "*But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water*"(John 19:33-34). Zechariah's fountain, therefore, is of blood and water.

When we looked at Leviticus 14:1-7 we read of a beautiful ceremony that God instigated in order to declare the leprosy sufferer clean. It involved two clean birds, the first of which was offered as a sacrifice under running water so that its blood mingled with the water. Then the second bird was dipped in the blood-water mixture and shaken over the sufferer seven times before being released. The leprosy sufferer was then declared free of the disease.

We are all tainted with the leprosy of sin, and Zechariah's prophecy looks to the day when the flow from Messiah's pierced side will wash all who come to Him for cleansing. As the hymn says:

> There is a fountain filled with blood,
> Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
> And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
> Lose all their guilty stains.[67]

[67] William Cowper, There is a Fountain, 1770.

If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.' Zechariah 13:6.

Shall we include this verse or not? The context has nothing to do with the Messiah, and no New Testament writer quotes it. Then why do so many believe it refers to the injuries sustained by Jesus during the Crucifixion? The context concerns the idol worshipping prophets who slashed themselves in order to strengthen their lies that no harm would come to Jerusalem. When Jerusalem did fall, they quickly denied ever having been prophets, but were challenged by reason of the wounds on their bodies. "Oh", they said, "they are just some unrelated injuries sustained at a friend's place". Hardly appropriate to apply these words to Jesus.

Then why did Zechariah mention it along with the piercing, the fountain, and the scattering of the sheep? Why did Jesus quote the very next verse, verse 7, as being fulfilled by His death if He did not also want us to note verse 6? Perhaps one of the most valuable insights this passage offers us is Jesus' hermeneutic technique. He has done this before, for example, in His quoting of the first half of Isaiah 61:2, *"to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour",* but not, *"and the day of vengeance of our God."* Why? Because the former phrase was for now, and the latter was for later.

Yet Jesus *was* wounded in the house of His friends. The Son of God had come to His own. If anyone was His friend, this people were. But "*He came to His own and His own received Him not"* (John 1:11). Had He come to Nineveh, no doubt they would have believed Him as they did Jonah, for He is greater than Jonah. So His friends were not His friends after all. But there are those who are His true friends; *they* would not have wounded Him. He told us who they are, they are those *"who do the will of my Father in heaven"* (John 15:14).

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. Zechariah13:7.

We do not need to conjecture long about the meaning of this verse because Jesus explained it for us. After the Last Supper was over, and they were making their way to Gethsemane, a great sadness came over Jesus. He said to His disciples, *"This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee"* (Matthew 26:31-32). Yes, the sheep were to be scattered, but only for a time. Jesus was telling the disciples that after they have scattered they should regroup in Galilee, and He will find them there. Now that's leadership!

Then why does Zechariah say that God will turn His hand against the little ones (the disciples)? The words are best understood in the light of Isaiah 1:25, where God says to Israel, *"I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities".* So when God turns His hand against His sheep and His little lambs, it is not in anger, but it is to help them grow in Christ. Sublime as the *Footsteps* poem might be, it is not always God's intent to carry us through the hard times; He wants to see us become more muscular Christians. As He said to Daniel the prophet, *"Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined…"* (Daniel 12:9, 10). We should not expect that our walk with Christ will always be easy. What we can expect is that, even though we will not know it at the time, God is doing the same for us as He did for the disciples. The events of Calvary were traumatic for them, but God was turning them from helpless sheep into shepherds.

December 21 On the Mount of Olives (DH)

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south…Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. Zechariah 14:4-5.

A little bit of geography might help here. The wall of the ancient city of Jerusalem formed a very rough rectangle aligned fairly well with the cardinal points of the compass. On the eastern side was the temple, and someone standing on the temple grounds looking eastwards would look out across the Kidron Valley to a hill about one kilometre away. That hill is the Mount of Olives. It was upon this hill that Jesus stood with His disciples when He was taken up in a cloud to heaven, and it was to this spot the angel said He will return *"in the same way you have seen him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11).

God's promises are always conditional upon our obedience. Zechariah's prophecies, as with Isaiah's, assume that the people would be faithful and that the Messiah would be welcomed at His first advent, and would then stand upon the Mount of Olives. Had that happened, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem would have been very different.

As it was, on that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem from Bethany, nothing happened to the hill as He stood upon it. But it will! God's promises never return to Him empty. Will it happen when Jesus returns in all His glory at the Second Coming, when *"the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God*"(1 Thessalonians 4:16)? Or will it occur on that glorious day at the end of the millennium when John saw "*the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband"* (Revelation 21:2)? I will leave that up to you to consider.

On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. Zechariah 14:8.

Living water is that pristine stream that bubbles out of a clean spring, cool, crystal clear, refreshing, and a delight to drink. In contrast is the water that is drawn up from a cistern which is stale and probably contaminated. The Lord describes the contrast between the two like this: *"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water"* (Jeremiah 2:13). God is the living water; we are the broken cisterns.

We can easily imagine the anger of the priests centuries later when Jesus of Nazareth cried out for all to hear, "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him"* (John 7:38). By these words, Jesus was publicly asserting that He was this living water, thereby making Himself equal with God. In these politically correct days we shudder when someone makes a controversial statement even when all know it to be completely true. Jesus had no interest in political correctness; if something needed to be said, He said it.

It needed to be said on this occasion at the Feast of Tabernacles because a vital lesson was being missed. The beautiful water ceremony which looked forward to the promise in today's reading was being enacted, but its significance was entirely lost to an uncomprehending people.[68] As Jesus watched the pure water of the Gihon Spring mingling with the wine as it coursed eastwards[69] down into the Kidron Valley, and saw so clearly its fulfilment in His death, He could not remain silent. Never mind the embarrassment; He knew some would remember His words when they came to Calvary.

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[68] See reading Leviticus 23:39-40.

[69] Calvary was situated on the western side of Jerusalem. Hence the blood and water which flowed from His side would symbolically flow westwards, thus fulfilling Zechariah's words exactly. They undoubtedly also will have a literal fulfilment for the New Jerusalem.

December 23 **The Only Name (ADH)**

The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. Zechariah 14:9.

The Lord, that is Jehovah, because *LORD* is capitalised, is the only name worthy of our worship. There is something familiar about these words. Weren't they the words Peter used when brought before the authorities for preaching Christ? *"Salvation is found in no one else,"* he said, *"for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12 NKJV). This has much to say about how the disciples understood the nature of Christ. They, and the priests, knew very well that Jehovah was the only name under heaven that can save us. Yet they were fearless in their assertion that Jesus was that name.

What's in a name? Often a name is hereditary. Or someone may be named by their trade, as in John (the) Smith. The Luo people of East Africa name their children according to the time of night or day they are born. In Bible times names were often given because of an anticipated character of the child. Thus Isaac named his second twin son Jacob, meaning *supplanter* because he was delivered holding the heel of his sibling (named Esau meaning 'hairy one'). Joseph, the guardian father of Jesus, was instructed by the angel to call his son Jeshua (in Greek, Jesus), meaning 'He will save', *"because he will save the people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21).

One day, soon we believe, Jesus will be King over the whole earth. *On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. For God has exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Zechariah 14:9; Philippians 2:9-11).

December 24 The Messenger of the Covenant (ACD)

*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant…*Malachi 3:1.

Two messengers are mentioned here; the first is to prepare the way for the second. We will consider the second today, 'the Angel of the Covenant, the Messiah. It is to the temple He first goes when He arrives, not to a royal throne. Perhaps that is in part why His arrival was unexpected. The people were waiting for a King, but did not expect a Messenger.

When Jesus first came to the temple He was but eight days old, and the only people who identified Him correctly were Simeon and Anna. *"Lord",* said Simeon, "*now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation* (Luke 2:29-30 NKJV). The second time was twelve years later, when the youth totally flummoxed the teachers with His understanding of spiritual things. Yet they did not twig who He was. The third time was the day He publicly entered Jerusalem riding a donkey to a refrain of Hosannas. On that occasion, even though He entered the city in the manner of a king, it was straight to the temple He went. After walking around and seeing the chaos there, He set about administering divine justice to those who had turned it into a market place, *"It is written",* He thundered, *"My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves"* (Luke 19:46 NKJV).

The temple services involve three activities: sacrifice, atonement, and judgment. Jesus *will* come as King to bring judgment to the world, but first there must be sacrifice and atonement. At the end of that very week the Messenger became the sacrifice, and His blood provided the atonement. Now He mediates for us all as Priest. But one day mediation will come to an end and judgment will begin. Then the Messenger will become the King.

December 25 Messenger of the Desert (BH)

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. Malachi 4:5.

There is so much in this verse that we will need several days to cover it. Who is this Elijah who will be sent before the coming of the Lord? If He is sent to prepare the way of the Messiah's coming to His temple, will he also be sent when Messiah comes to claim His throne? How will we recognise Elijah? Will he be the original resurrected? Or will he be a person or movement that lives and works in the spirit of Elijah? These are questions which demand answers.

Jesus was in no doubt about who Elijah was: John the Baptist. *"This is the one",* He said of John, *"about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you…*" (Luke 7:27). John also testified of Jesus saying, *"This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah…"* (Matthew 3:3). Thus Jesus testified of John saying, "*This is the one…"*, and John testified of Jesus saying, "*This is the one…"* Such mutual tribute normally requires some kind of collusion between the parties involved. Did Jesus and John agree between themselves to say this? They were cousins, and were certainly aware of each other. Yet Jesus lived in Nazareth, and John *"…lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel"* (Luke 1:80). Furthermore, John had to be given a sign from heaven in order for him to recognise the Messiah *"The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain,"* He was told, *"is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit"* (John 1:33).

Jesus said that John, as a man, was least of all. Yet as a prophet none was ever greater. It was not the man, but his message, that made him great. As we study this Elijah we shall see that as Messiah will come again, so must Elijah come again to prepare the way of the Lord. Like John he too will be the least of men, but, like John, he too will come to be called the greatest prophet who ever lived.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.... Malachi 4:5-6.

Jesus told His disciples that even though Elijah had already come, he will come again *"to restore all things"* (Matthew 17:11-12).[70] Malachi also says that Elijah will come "*before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes",* an event that is still future. How shall we recognise the Elijah who is to come? The only way is by studying Elijah himself, and, by extension, John the Baptist. What kind of men were they, and what recognisable characteristics did they hold? What can we learn from them? The answers to these questions will help us know which among the plethora of religious voices claiming our attention today is the voice we should heed.

We know little about Elijah as a man except that his lifestyle was simple. His message led the king to blame Israel's woes upon him and to call him the 'troubler of Israel'. He worked few miracles, yet his successor Elisha performed many miracles. He stood alone against an overwhelming majority who opposed him, and was hated by the queen who vowed to have him put to death.

Similarly John was a man of the desert, of simple taste and lifestyle. He had taken a Nazirite vow which meant that he used no alcohol. John also did no miracle, yet One came after him who did many miracles. He stood alone before the religious leaders calling them 'a brood of vipers, and was hated by Herod's wife, who unlike Jezebel, did succeed in having him put to death.

The similarities between Elijah and John the men are given to enable us to recognise the one we should be looking for today. Tomorrow we will look at their message.

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[70] This is saying the same thing as Malachi who says the hearts of the people will be turned back to one another. To turn back implies repentance (the Greek word for 'repent' means 'to turn back'. This is why John said, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand").

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.... Malachi 4:5-6.

From what we have learned of Elijah and John the men, we should not be looking for a popular miracle-working Elijah today. For these men, their Power was not in their persona, it was in their message. Isaiah has written, *"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (8:20). 'Law' refers to the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible, and which include the Ten Commandments. 'Testimony' refers to the witness of the writings and the prophets. Today we have a New Testament in addition to the Old, and these are the basis for Elijah's message. If they speak not according to this word there is no light in them.

Yet there is more to it than that. The Gospel is always there, but the context in which it is presented can change. Just as the Reformation brought the concept of Righteousness by Faith, so the Elijah-to-come will present the Gospel in the context of the soon return of Christ. Hard as it may appear to some, the gospel preacher who never preaches the Bible and never preaches the coming King is probably not Elijah.

The reality is that neither Elijah nor John had easy messages to give. Elijah sought a turning away from idolatry and a return to worship the true God. John sought repentance and cleansing from sin. This gives the latter-day Elijah a doubly difficult task, for today's generation is more idolatrous than any before it, and what preacher in his or her right mind will tell their congregation to repent from sin? Therefore, like his forbear, the modern-day Elijah may be tempted to believe that he alone is faithful when the truth is that among the humble poor of the world there will be 'seven thousand' who have not bowed the knee to Baal (1Kings 19:18).

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. Malachi 4:5-6.

John has an important lesson for us in witnessing for Christ; when asked to identify himself, he could have said, "I am John", or, "I am the son of Zechariah", or, "I live in the desert and eat locusts". Instead, he simply said, "*I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord."* (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:3). Witnessing for Christ is not talking about us; it is talking about Jesus. John well understood that his role was to draw his hearers' attention to someone greater, and he received little earthly reward for his work. Almost as soon as it was done he was thrown into prison to remain there until put to death at a whim. Yet, when he awakes on the resurrection morning he shall learn the true value of his life.

Elijah's ministry has much to teach about how events will be in the last days. It would be worthwhile to go back again and look at those readings that cover 1Kings 18 and 19 for an insight on this. Especially did the Carmel incident anticipate the final conflict between good and evil. As Elijah brought fire from heaven, so the Enemy will imitate the event in order to deceive the people. As Elijah prayed for rain, and saw the small cloud arise from the sea, so the latter day Elijah must pray without ceasing for the return of the Lord. Then he will see *a white cloud, and seated on the cloud ... one "like a son of man"* (Revelation 13:13, 14:14). Finally Elijah was given the privilege of being translated without tasting death. So the Elijah of the last days, alive at the second coming of Christ*, "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever".*

December 29 **The Emmaus Road (B)**

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27

Easter Sunday began, for most of Christ's followers, as a day of total devastation. Never had life looked bleaker, *"we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"* was all two heartbroken disciples could think of saying as they forlornly made their way home to Emmaus. Little did they know that the Stranger to whom they spoke was none other than He who would redeem Israel – indeed He had already redeemed it However, Jesus had a lesson to teach his dear friends before He revealed this joyful truth to them. Had He revealed Himself now, they would have been too excited to comprehend a vital principle of the Gospel that they, and we, must understand. In order to be of maximum effect in our service to God and man, we must understand clearly that the Scriptures from beginning to end, are all about the Messiah. If we are to fully understand the power of the Bible, we must understand that its grand theme, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, is Jesus; Jesus is what the Bible is all about. Therefore, He said to them, *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself* (Luke 24:25-27). The hearts of these two good men burned within them as the lessons they learned from the Stranger sunk home. When they arrived in Emmaus they insisted He enter their home so that they could serve Him food and that He would continue to feed them. When Jesus spread His hands in His usual gesture of thanks, suddenly the two men understood everything. There, before them, in the open hands, was the cruel result of Calvary's nails.

December 30 He Who Opens Minds (B)

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Luke 24:45.

We started this devotional with Jesus' claim that the Scriptures testify of Him, that He is 'the Man on the back'. Now we have had a year's supply of opportunities to assess that claim for ourselves. We cannot help but ask what is the probability of all these prophecies, types, shadows and allusions all being fulfilled in one individual. Yet how many of them can be gainsaid? Some, it might be argued, might have been manipulated to 'fulfil all righteousness', but how does one manipulate Calvary in the light of Psalm 22? How would an imposter stage-manage the anointing and cutting-off of the Messiah as foretold in Daniel 9:24-27? If not Jesus, who else was anointed at the beginning of the 70th week? Someone had to be, for the prophet had spoken.

Yesterday we read of two discouraged disciples moping slowly homeward nursing their shattered hopes. The stranger who joined them, "*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets… explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself".* What did the risen Christ say to these two confused men? Whatever it was, it led their hearts to burn within them. The record says He started with Moses, Maybe something like, "Was it not spoken by the prophet that the Seed's heel was to be bruised in crushing the serpent's head? Should not the Christ have died as God's Passover Lamb? Was the Christ not to be raised from death on the day of the Firstfruits? Then to David, Isaiah and so many others who have painted such a powerful and colourful picture of Christ, the Servant, the Shepherd, Prophet, the Priest and the King. Christ still walks the Emmaus Road; the Scriptures still speak; hearts still burn.

December 31 The Great Commissioner (B)

He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:46-48.

Later, as the disciples dwelt together in 'one accord' to await the fire of the Holy Spirit, the two Bible students would share the precious experience of their walk with Christ to Emmaus. That knowledge would provide a foundation for the disciples' understanding of how to use the Scriptures. But now, after the two breathless men have returned to Jerusalem to share their story, Jesus had come into their midst with further instruction for them that only now, after their humiliation and their enlightenment, could they take in. They would soon go out from Jerusalem into the entire world with an invitation from heaven to all who will turn away from sin. But first there was a work to do: first they must put aside their rivalries and ambitions in order to learn unity in Christ. Whether zealot or pacifist, fisherman or tax-collector, they must grow into one accord and one love. Such unity was to be the gift of God, but available only by prayer and soul-searching. This is what prepared them to receive the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Then, and only then, could they receive the power and authority to fulfil the Great Commission.

This little book has taken us on the road to Emmaus. We have seen Jesus as He wishes to be seen. Unity must come too, not necessarily unity in doctrine or knowledge, but unity in Christ. Then Jesus will say to us, as He did to the disciples, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Matthew 28:18-20.

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Exodus 16:2-3	March 15	Matthew 4:4
Exodus 24:8	March 22	Hebrews 9:20
Deuteronomy 21:22-23	May 12	Galatians 3:13
Psalm 2:7	June 25	Acts 13:32-33
Psalm 8:5-6	June 27	Hebrews 2:5-9
Psalm 16:9-10	June 28	Acts 2:27-31
Psalm 22:1	June 29	Matthew 27:46
Psalm 22:18	July 3	Matt 27:35; Jn 19:24
Psalm 22:22	July 4	Hebrews 2:12
Psalm 34:19-20	July 8	John 19:36
Psalm 40:6-8	July 9	Hebrews 10:4-10
Psalm 41:9	July 10	John13:18
Psalm 45:6-7	July 11	Hebrews 1:1-14
Psalm 69:4	July 13	John 15:24-25
Psalm 69:9	July 14	John 2:17; Rom 15:3
Psalm 69:25	July 16	Acts 1:20
Psalm 109:8	July 16	Acts 1:20
Psalm 78:1-4	July 19	Matthew 13:34-35
Psalm 102:25-27	July 20	Hebrews 1:10-12
Psalm 110:1-2	July 21	Acts 2:34-35
Psalm 110:4	July 22	Hebrews 5:6, 7:17-21

Psalm 118:22-23	July 23	Acts 4:11-12
Isaiah 6:8-11	July 31	Matt.13:14; Jn 12:40
Isaiah 7:14	August 1	Matthew 1:23
Isaiah 9:1-2	August 2	Matthew 4:12-17
Isaiah 11:1-3	August 9-10	Matthew 2:23
Isaiah 40:3	August 24	Matthew 3:3
Isaiah 40:4-5	August 25	Luke 3: 6
Isaiah 42:2-3	August 29	Matthew 12:20
Isaiah 42:2-3	August 30	Matthew 12:19
Isaiah 42:4	August 31	Matthew 12:21
Isaiah 53:1	September 20	John 12:37-38
Isaiah 53:4	September 23	Matthew 8:17
Jeremiah 31:15	October 22	Matthew 2:18
Hosea 11:1	November 18	Matthew 2:15
Amos 9:11-12	November 22	Acts 15:16-17
Micah 5:2	November 27	Matthew 2:6
Zechariah 9:9	December 13	Matthew 21:5
Zechariah 11:12-13	December 16	Matthew 27:3-10
Zechariah 12:10	December 17	John 19:37
Zechariah13:7	December 20	Matthew 26:31-32

D-In Prophecy:

Text	Date	Event
Genesis 3:14-15	January 12	Seed's heel bruised
Genesis 5:29	January 20	Patriarchal Names
Genesis 12:1-3	January 27	The Promised Land
Genesis 18:17-18	February 2	All nations blessed
Genesis 22:16-18	February 10	All nations blessed
Genesis 49:10	March 1	Judah's sceptre
Numbers 24:17	April 29	Star out of Jacob
Deuteronomy 18:15	May 9	Prophet like Moses
Deuteronomy 18:18	May 10-11	Prophet like Moses
1Samuel 2:35	May 22	Faithful - Priest
2Samuel 7:16	May 28	The Forever kingdom
1Chronicles 17:12-14	June 15	The Forever King
Psalm 2:8-9	June 26	Rod - Protector
Psalm 22:7-8	June 30	Mockery
Psalm 22:18	July 3	Garments
Psalm 22:22	July 4	Declares name
Psalm 34:19-20	July 8	No bones broken
Psalm 41:9	July 10	Heel Lifted
Psalm 45:6-7	July 11	Throne to last forever
Psalm 69:20-21	July 15	Man of sorrows
Psalm 69:25	July 16	Judas
Psalm 72:17	July 17	Blessing to all nations

Psalm 132:11-12	July 24	David's throne
Isaiah 2:19-21	July 29	Second Advent
Isaiah 4:2	July 30	The Branch
Isaiah 7:14	August 1	First Advent
Isaiah 9:1-2	August 2	Will honour Galilee
Isaiah 9:6	August 3	Govt. upon shoulder
Isaiah 9:6	August 4	Wonderful Counsellor
Isaiah 9:6	August 5	Mighty God
Isaiah 9:6	August 6	Everlasting Father
Isaiah 9:6	August 7	Prince of peace
Isaiah 9:7	August 8	Rules in justice
Isaiah 11:1-3	August 9	The Nazarene
Isaiah 11:1-3	August 10	The Just Judge
Isaiah 11:4-5	August 11	The Righteous Judge
Isaiah 11:10	August 12	Banner of the people
Isaiah 28:16-17	August 15	The Cornerstone
Isaiah 28:21	August 16	Strange Work
Isaiah 33:17-21	August 17	We shall see the King
Isaiah 33:24	August 19	Healer and Forgiver
Isaiah 35:1-2	August 20	One Big Picture
Isaiah 35:3-4	August 21	God will act
Isaiah 35:5-7	August 22	Healer & Avenger
Isaiah 35:10	August 23	Redeemed return
Isaiah 40:3	August 24	Prepare the way
Isaiah 40:4-5	August 25	Rough made plain
Isaiah 42:1	August 28	Anointing
Isaiah 42:2-3	August 29-30	The Diplomat
Isaiah 42:4	August 31	The Faithful Servant
Isaiah 42:5-7	September 1	The Covenant
Isaiah 45:1	September 4	Cyrus - anointed
Isaiah 49:5-6	September 7	Job Description
Isaiah 50:6	September 11	Maltreatment
Isaiah 51:10-11	September 14	Zion & Singing
Isaiah 52:13	Sept. 16-17	Lifted up & Exalted
Isaiah 52:14	September 18	Marred visage
Isaiah 52:15	September 19	Kings stand in awe
Isaiah 53:1	September 20	Belief
Isaiah 53:2	September 21	Of plain appearance
Isaiah 53:3	September 22	Despised, rejected
Isaiah 53:4	September 23	Bore our weaknesses
Isaiah 53:5	September 24	Pierced for our sins
Isaiah 53:5	September 25	Brought us peace
Isaiah 53:6	September 26	Our sins on Him
Isaiah 53:7	September 27	Silent under duress
Isaiah 53:8	September 28	Denied justice

Isaiah 53:9	September 29	A rich man's tomb
Isaiah 53:10	September 30	Lord's will to crush
Isaiah 53:11	October 1	Will bear our sins
Isaiah 53:12	October 2	Intercedes for sinner
Isaiah 59:15-16	October 5	Sends Himself
Isaiah 59:17-18	October 6	Repays His enemies
Isaiah 59:19	October 7	Like a pent-up flood
Isaiah 59:20	October 8	Zion
Isaiah 60:19-20	October 9	The Lord is the Light
Isaiah 61:2-3	October 11	Day of vengeance
Isaiah 63:3-5	October 13	The winepress
Isaiah 66:15-16	October 14	Judging with fire
Isaiah 66:22-23	October 15	A new earth
Jeremiah 23:5-6	October 20	The Branch
Jeremiah 31:31-34	October 23	The New Covenant
Lamentations 1:12	October 24	Incomparable Sorrow
Lamentations 4:20	October 25	Entrapped
Ezekiel 34:23-24	October 29	The Good Shepherd
Daniel 2:44-45	October 30	The Rock to come
Daniel 7:13-14	November 2	Coming in the clouds
Daniel 8:13-14	November 3	Heavenly High Priest
Daniel 8:13-14	November 4	Sanctuary cleansed
Daniel 9:24	November 5	The seventy weeks
Daniel 9:24	November 6	Atones for Sin
Daniel 9:24	November 7	Fulfils all prophecy
Daniel 9:24	November 8	Most Holy anointed
Daniel 9:25	November 9	The seventy weeks
Daniel 9:26	November 10	Cut off 69½ weeks
Daniel 9:27	November 11	An end of sacrifice
Daniel 9:27	November 12	The Kingdom grows
Daniel 11:20-22	November 14	The Prince broken
Daniel 12:1	November 15	The Prince delivers
Obadiah 1:14-15	November 23	Judgment at hand
Micah 4:1-2	November 25	The Lord's Mountain
Micah 5:2	November 27	Born in Bethlehem
Micah 5:3	November 28	Rebuilds Israel
Micah 5:4	November 29	Shepherd of world
Habakkuk 2:3	December 1	His return is certain
Zephaniah 1:14-16	December 3	Signs of the Times
Zephaniah 3:14-17	December 4	God dwells with us
Haggai 2:9	December 5	The Temple's Glory
Zechariah 2:10-11	December 7	Coming Soon
Zechariah 3:8	December 11	The Coming Branch
Zechariah 6:12-13	December 12	The King-Priest
Zechariah 9:9	December 13	The King on the colt

Zechariah 11:1-3	December 14	Temple destroyed
Zechariah 11:12-13	December 16	Betrayed
Zechariah 12:10	December 17	Pierced
Zechariah 13:1	December 18	Blood and Water
Zechariah 14:4-5	December 21	Stands on Olivet
Zechariah 14:8	December 22	Living Water
Zechariah 14:9	December 23	The only Name
Malachi 3:1	December 24	The Messenger King
Malachi 4:5-6	December 26	Elijah to return
Malachi 4:5-6	December 27	Elijah's message
Malachi 4:5-6	December 28	Elijah's witness

E-In People Types of Christ:

Text	Date	Person	Type
Gen. 2:15-17	Jan 9	Adam	2nd Adam
Genesis 6:7-8	Jan 21	Noah	Saviour
Genesis 6:9	Jan 22	Noah	Saviour
Genesis 12:1-3	Jan 27	Abraham	A blessing
Gen. 14:18-20	Jan 28	Melchizedek	Priest & King
Gen. 18:27-28	Feb 3	Abraham	Advocate
Genesis 21:6-7	Feb 4	Isaac	Promised
Genesis 26:4-5	Feb 13	Abraham	Obedience
Gen. 26:19-22	Feb 14	Isaac	Meekness
Gen. 26:26-31	Febr 15	Isaac	Humility
Genesis 27:37	Feb 16	Isaac	Integrity
Gen. 29:17-20	Feb 18	Jacob	Loves Bride
Gen. 31:38-40	Febr 19	Jacob	Good Shepherd
Genesis 37:3	Feb 22	Joseph	Special Son
Genesis 39:9	Feb 25	Joseph	Hatred of sin
Gen. 40:14-15	Feb 26	Joseph	Forgiving
Gen. 41:55-57	Feb 27	Joseph	The Provider
Genesis 49:26	Mar 2	Joseph	Christ-type
Exodus 4:22-23	Mar 8	Israel	Firstborn Son
Exodus 7:10-12	Mar 9	Moses	Miracle worker
Ex. 24:9-10	Mar 23	Moses	Transfigured
Exodus 31:1-6	Mar 27	Bezalel	Master Craftsman
Ex. 32:11-12	Mar 30	Moses	Intercessor
Ex. 32:30-32	Mar 31	Moses	Intercessor
Lev. 10:16-17	Apr 6	Aaron	Guilt-bearer
Num. 35:25	May 1	High Priest	Death of High Priest
Deut. 18:15	May 9	Moses	'The Prophet like me'
Deut. 18:18	May 10	Moses	The Prophet to come
Deut.18:18	May 11	Moses	'The Prophet like you'
Deut. 34:9	May 13	Joshua	Jeshua
Ruth 3:7-9	May 19	Boaz	Kinsman-redeemer

Ruth 4:13-14	May 20	Boaz	Looks on heart
1Samuel 2:26	May 21	Samuel	Grew in wisdom
1Samuel 2:35	May 22	Zadok	The Faithful Priest
1Sam. 16:11-13	May 23	David	After God's own heart
1Sam. 25:14-16	May 24	David	A Wall around us
2Samuel 5:4-9	May 26	Jerusalem	City of David
2Sam. 6:21-22	May 27	David	Humiliation
2Samuel 8:15	May 29	David	Righteous Ruler
2Samuel 9:1	May 30	David	At the King's table
2Samuel 14:9	May 31	David	Took the sinner's guilt
2Samuel . 15:4	Jun 1	Absalom	Lucifer
1Kings 4:29-31	Jun 3	Solomon	King of great nation
1Kings 18:21	Jun 7	Elijah	Preparing the way
1Kings 19:1-2	Jun 10	Elijah	Condemned to death
2Kings 2:9-10	Jun 11	Elisha	Miracle worker
2Kings 4:25-27	Jun 13	Elisha	Patiently nurtures
2Kings 6:21-22	Jun 14	Elisha	The Great Teacher
Ezra 5:2	Jun 17	Zerubbabel	Leads remnant home
Ezra 7:6-10	Jun 18	Ezra	Teacher / Lawgiver
Job 2:3	Jun 21	Job	True goodness
Psalm 72:17	Jul 17	Solomon	Blessing to nations
Isaiah 6:8-11	Jul 31	Isaiah	The willing volunteer
Is. 22:20-22	Aug 13	Hilkiah	Keeper of the keys
Isaiah 45:1	Sep 4	Cyrus	Anointed to deliver
Jeremiah 8:20	Oct 16	Jeremiah	The weeping prophet
Jeremiah 9:1	Oct 17	Jeremiah	The weeping prophet
Jeremiah 20:10	Oct 19	Jeremiah	Sought to trap him
Jeremiah 26:11	Oct 21	Jeremiah	Self-Condemned
Ezekiel 2:3-5	Oct 28	Ezekiel	Sent to a hard people
Hosea 3:1-2	Nov 16	Hosea	Lover of the unfaithful
Jonah 2:6	Nov 24	Jonah	Three days in earth
Haggai 2:23	Dec 6	Zerubbabel	The Signet Ring
Zechariah 3:1	Dec 8	Joshua	Our Righteousness
Zechariah 3:8	Dec 11	Colleagues	Symbolic

In Place Types of Christ:

Text	Date	Place	Type
Genesis 22:14	Feb 9	Mt. Moriah	Temple Mount
Gen. 32:24-26	Feb 21	Jabbok	Gethsemane
Ex. 14:21-22	Mar 13	Wilderness	Wilderness
Exodus 25:8-9	Mar 24	Sanctuary	Sanctuary complex
Num. 35:9-11	Apr 30	Cities of refuge	Our Refuge
Deut. 8:7-9	May 6	The good land	Shepherd
2Sam. 5:4-9	May 26	Jerusalem	The New Jerusalem
2Sam. 24:24-25	Jun 2	Moriah	The temple site

1Kings 6:19-20	Jun 4	Most Holy Place	New Jerusalem
2Chron. 6:18	Jun 16	Temple	Heavenly Temple
Psalm 73:16-17	Jul 18	Sanctuary	Heavenly Sanctuary
Isaiah 59:20	Oct 8	Zion	Heavenly Jerusalem
Micah 4:1-2	Nov 25	Zion	The Lord's Mountain

In Event Types of Christ:

Text	Date	Event	Type
Genesis 3:21	Jan 16	Garments	Forgiveness
Gen. 7:11-12	Jan 23	Flood	Second Advent
Gen. 15:9-17	Jan 29	The Blood Path	Calvary
Genesis 22:1-2	Feb 6	Mt. Moriah	Calvary
Genesis 46:2-4	Feb 28	Israel to Egypt	Jesus to Egypt
Exodus 1:22	Mar 3	Moses saved	Jesus saved
Exodus 12:3-6	Mar 10	Passover	Lamb set aside
Ex. 12:7-13	Mar 11	Blood on door	Calvary
Ex. 14:21-22	Mar 13	Red Sea	Jordon baptism
Exodus 17:5-7	Mar 17	Meribah	Wilderness
Ex. 17:11-12	Mar 19	Raised hands	Calvary
Ex. 31:12-17	Mar 28	Holy Time	Holy Person
Exodus 34:28	Apr 3	Moses Elijah	Jesus
Lev. 10:16-17	Apr 6	Offering eaten	This is my body
Lev. 16:8-9	Apr 8	Sanctuary	Heavenly Sanctuary
Leviticus 16:10	Apr 9	Azazel	Sin removed forever
Lev. 23:1-4	Apr 10	Annual Feasts	Heavenly plan
Leviticus 23:5	Apr 11	Passover	Calvary
Leviticus 23:6	Apr 12	Unleavened	The Tomb
Lev. 23:10-11	Apr 13	Firstfruits	Resurrection
Lev. 23:15-16	Apr 14	Weeks	Pentecost
Lev. 23:23-24	Apr 15	Trumpets	Final Call
Lev. 23:26-28	Apr 16	Atonement	Judgment
Lev. 23:39-40	Apr 17	Tabernacles	God with us
Lev. 25:10-11	Apr 19	The Jubilee	Restoration of earth
Num. 11:16-17	Apr 22	The Seventy	Kingdom structure
Num. 19:1-3	Apr 24	Red Heifer	Christ purifies
Numbers 19:9	Apr 25	Ashes	The Clean Man
Num. 21:4-7	Apr 27	Snake on Pole	Calvary
Num. 21:8-9	Apr 28	Became Sin	Became Sin
Numbers 24:17	Apr 29	Balaam's curse	Betrayal by Judas
Deut. 4:21-22	May 2	Moses' death	Christ's death
Deut. 5:15	May 3	Creation Rest	Redemption Rest
Joshua 6:4-5	May 16	Local Judgment	Global Judgment
2Kings 2:11-12	Jun 12	Translation	Transfiguration
Psalm 22:22	Jul 4	David's trouble	The Crucifixion
Psalm 23:1-4	Jul 5	David's peace	The Tomb

In Article Types of Christ:

Text	Date	Object
Genesis 3:21	January 16	Garments
Genesis 7:17	January 24	Noah's Ark
Genesis 22:6	February 7	Isaac's wood
Genesis 22:13	February 8	The substitute ram
Genesis 28:10-13	February 17	Jacob's ladder
Genesis 37:3	February 22	Joseph's coat
Exodus 12:3-6	March 10	The Passover lamb
Exodus 12:7-13	March 11	Doorposts
Exodus 13:21-22	March 12	The pillar of cloud
Exodus 16:13-15	March 16	The manna
Exodus 17:6	March 18	The Rock
Exodus 27:20	March 25	Menorah
Exodus 28:2-3	March 26	Priestly Robes
Leviticus 6:12-13	April 5	Eternal flame
Leviticus 16:8-9	April 8	The two goats
Leviticus 24:5-7	April 18	Bread and incense
Numbers 17:8	April 23	Aaron's rod
Numbers 20:7-12	April 26	Rod, Rock and Water
Numbers 21:4-7	April 27	Snake on the pole
Numbers 21:8-9	April 28	Snake on the pole
Joshua 2:17-18	May 14	Scarlet Cord
1Kings 7:15-22	June 5	Jakin and Boaz
Psalm 118:22-23	July 23	Cornerstone
Isaiah 28:16-17	August 15	Cornerstone

F-Historical Narrative

Text	Date	Narrative
Genesis 46:2-4	February 28	Into Egypt
Exodus 1:22	March 3	Slaughter of infants
Exodus 4:22	March 7	Firstborn Son
Exodus 4:22-23	March 8	Firstborn dedication
Exodus 14:21-22	March 13	Dividing of waters
Exodus 15:26	March 14	The first miracle
Exodus 16:2-3	March 15	Appetite
Exodus 17:5-7	March 17	Presumption
Exodus 19:20, 20:1-2	March 20	Law and Grace
Exodus 24:9-10	March 23	Moses - Organisation
Exodus 32:7-8	March 29	Idolatry
Exodus 34:28	April 3	40 days & 40 nights
Numbers 11:16-17	April 22	Government
Numbers 21:4-7	April 27	Snake on Pole
Numbers 21:8-9	April 28	Snake on pole
Deuteronomy 8:2	May 5	Wilderness sojourn

Deuteronomy 8:7-9	May 6	Led into a good land
Deuteronomy 9:9-10	May 7	In presence of God
2Samuel 24:24-25	June 2	The threshing floor
Esther 3:8	June 20	Good v. Evil theme
Psalm 2:1-2	June 24	Against the Anointed
Jeremiah 31:15	October 22	Rachel's children
Lamentations 1:12	October 24	Incomparable Sorrow

G-Gospel Theme:

Text	Date	Theme
Genesis 1:1-4	January 2	Jesus and Genesis
Genesis 3:14-15	January 13	His heel bruised
Genesis 3:21	January 16	Blood sacrifice
Genesis 4:4-5	January 18	True worship
Genesis 4:25-26	January 19	The Seed
Genesis 9:8-11	January 25	Covenant
Genesis 9:13-15	January 26	Justice & Mercy
Genesis 15:9-17	January 29	The Blood Path
Genesis 17:7	January 31	Children of Abraham
Genesis 17:10-11	February 1	Circumcision
Genesis 18:17-18	February 2	Abraham's Seed
Genesis 21:8-10	February 5	Grace and works
Genesis 24:60	February 11	Rebekah's Blessing
Genesis 24:64-67	February 12	Isaac's marriage
Genesis 37:3	February 22	Righteousness
Genesis 38:9-10	February 23	The Seed
Genesis 38:24-25	February 24	The Seed
Exodus 2:15-17	March 4	Wells and weddings
Exodus 12:7-13	March 11	The blood sprinkled
Exodus 24:8	March 22	Covenant
Exodus 28:2-3	March 26	Righteousness
Exodus 31:12-17	March 28	Divine Sabbath Rest
Exodus 32:30-32	March 31	The Intercessor
Exodus 34:25a	April 1	Sinless sacrifice
Exodus 39:43	April 4	Completion blessing
Leviticus 6:12-13	April 5	Eternal flame
Leviticus 10:16-17	April 6	Eating the offering
Leviticus 14:1-7	April 7	The leprosy of sin
Leviticus 17:11-12	April 10	Atoning Blood
Leviticus 23:1-4	April 11	Annual Feasts
Leviticus 25:10-11	April 19	Jubilee
Leviticus 25:47-48	April 20	Kinsman-Redeemer
Numbers 19:1-3	April 24	Red Heifer
Numbers 19:9	April 25	Ritual Purity
Numbers 20:7-12	April 26	Rock, Rod, & Water

Deuteronomy 5:15	May 3	Our Sabbath Rest
Deuteronomy 21:22-23	May 12	Became the curse
Ruth 3:7-9	May 19	Kinsman-Redeemer
1Samuel 30:23-25	May 25	Privilege of Service
2Samuel 9:1	May 30	The Kings Table
2Samuel 14:9	May 31	The Woman of Tekoa
1Kings 8:27	June 6	God with us
Job 19:25-27	June 22	My Redeemer Lives
Psalm 1:1-3	June 23	Christ in the Psalms
Psalm 2:8-9	June 26	Rod - Protector
Psalm 73:16-17	July 18	Justice
Psalm 132:11-12	July 24	David's throne
Isaiah 1:18	July 28	Scarlet Robe
Isaiah 26:19	August 14	Resurrection
Isaiah 28:21	August 16	His strange work
Isaiah 33:17-21	August 17	Beautiful King
Isaiah 33:22	August 18	Legal System
Isaiah 35:1-2	August 20	One Big Picture
Isaiah 35:3-4	August 21	God will act
Isaiah 40:10-11	August 26	The shepherd's rod
Isaiah 41:14	August 27	Redeemer
Isaiah 50:4	September 10	Word in due season
Isaiah 52:7	September 15	Beautiful Feet
Isaiah 53:1	September 20	Belief
Isaiah 54:5	October 3-4	Husband
Isaiah 61:8	October 12	Everlasting Covenant
Jeremiah 11:16	October 18	The Olive Tree
Jeremiah 31:31-34	October 23	The New Covenant
Hosea 3:1-2	November 16	Lover of the unfaithful
Micah 5:4	November 29	The Shepherd
Habakkuk 2:4	December 2	Watch and believe
Zechariah 3:2	December 9	The Reprover
Zechariah 3:3-4	December 10	Rich Garments

H-New Testament Allusion:

Text	Date	Allusion
Genesis 1:1	Jan 3	John 1:1...
Genesis 1:2	Jan 4	Matt. 3:16; Mk 1:10; Luke 3:22...
Genesis 1:3	Jan 5	John 1:5, 3:19, 8:12; 2Cor. 4:6...
Genesis 1:3-4	Jan 6	John 8:12; 1John 1:5
Genesis 1:3-4	Jan 7	Revelation 21:23-26...
Genesis 2:1-3	Jan 8	Luke 23:50-56; John 19:30...
Gen. 2:15-17	Jan 9	John 19:41; 1Peter 2:24; 1Cor 15:45
Gen. 2:21-22	Jan 10	John 19:31-37
Genesis 3:6	Jan 11	Matthew 4:1-4

Gen. 3:14-15	Jan 14f	Revelation 12
Genesis 3:21	Jan 16	Matthew 2:11-12; Rev. 6:11, 7:9-14...
Genesis 4:4-5	Jan 18	Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:22...
Gen. 7:11-12	Jan 23	2Pet. 3:5-12; Rev. 16, 20:14-15...
Gen. 7:17	Jan 24	Luke 5:32; John 3:14-15, 12:32...
Gen. 14:18-20	Jan 28	Matthew 26:26-28; 1Cor. 11:23-28...
Gen. 15:9-17	Jan 29	Mark 15:15-20 ; John 19:17...
Gen. 18:17-18	Feb 2	Galatians 3:26-29...
Gen. 18:27-28	Feb 3	Romans 8:26; Heb. 7:25; 1John 2:1...
Gen. 21:8-10	Feb 5	Galatians 4:21-31...
Genesis 22:6	Feb 7	Matthew 10:38, 16:24; John 19:17...
Gen. 24:64-67	Feb 12	John 14:1-3...
Gen. 26:26-31	Feb 15	Revelation 19:9...
Gen. 28:10-13	Feb 17	John 1:51...
Genesis 39:9	Feb 25	Luke 11:4; Hebrews 4:15...
Gen. 41:55-57	Feb 27	Matthew 6:11, 14:13-21; John 6:35...
Genesis 46:2-4	Feb 28	Matthew 3:17...
Genesis 49:26	Mar 2	Matthew 22:12; Luke 7:22, 23:40-41...
Exodus 1:22	Mar 3	Matthew 2:13-18
Ex. 3:13-14	Mar 5	John 8:24, 28, 58
Exodus 3:15	Mar 6	John 8:58
Exodus 4:22	Mar 7	Matthew 3:17
Exodus 12:3-6	Mar 10	1Corinthians 5:7...
Exodus 15:26	Mar 14	John 2:9 -11
Exodus 16:2-3	Mar 15	Matthew 4:1-4
Ex. 16:13-15	Mar 16	John 6:51-54...
Exodus 17:5-7	Mar 17	Matthew 4:5-6
Exodus 17:6	Mar 18	Matthew 16:18; John 4:14, 7:37...
Ex. 19:20, 20:1	Mar 20	Matthew 5:1-2...
Ex. 23:20-21	Mar 21	John 14:1-3
Exodus 24:8	Mar 22	Matthew 26:27
Ex. 24:9-10	Mar 23	Mark 9:1-4
Exodus 25:8-9	Mar 24	Matthew 21:13; Hebrews 8-10...
Exodus 27:20	Mar 25	John 1:9...
Exodus 28:2-3	Mar 26	Revelation 7:13-14, 22:14...
Ex. 31:12-17	Mar 28	Matthew 11:28-29; Hebrews 4...
Exodus 32:7-8	Mar 29	Matthew 4:7-11
Ex. 32:11-12	Mar 30	Romans 8:26; 1John 2:1...
Ex. 32:30-32	Mar 31	Romans 5:7-8; Philippians 2:6-8...
Ex. 34:25a	Apr 1	1Corinthians 5:6-7...
Ex. 34:25b	Apr 2	John 19:31-42
Lev. 6:12-13	Apr 5	Acts 2:3
Lev. 14:1-7	Apr 7	John 19:34; 1John 5:6,8
Leviticus 16:10	Apr 9	Matthew 27:15-26
Leviticus 23:5	Apr 12	John 1:29, 19:14, 36; 1Cor. 5:7...

Lev. 23:10-11	Apr 13	Luke 23:53-56; 1Cor. 15:20-23...
Lev .23:15-16	Apr 14	Acts 2...
Lev. 23:23-24	Apr 15	Revelation 14:6-13...
Lev. 23:26-28	Apr 16	Revelation 14:14-20, 19:11-21...
Lev. 23:39-40	Apr 17	Matt. 1:23; John 7:37-38; Rev. 19:7...
Numbers 6:1-8	Apr 21	Matthew 26:29...
Num. 11:16-17	Apr 22	Luke 10:1-24
Number 17:8	Apr 23	Revelation 2:27, 12:5, 19:15
Num. 21:4-7	Apr 27	John 3:14-15
Num. 21:8-9	Apr 28	2Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13...
Num. 35:9-11	Apr 30	Romans 8:1; 1Peter 5:8...
Deut. 4:21-22	May 2	Matt. 26:38, 27:45-46; Luke 9:28-31...
Deut. 8:7-9	May 6	1Corinthians 2:9; Revelation 21:1...
Deut. 17:1	May 8	Hebrews 4:15; 1Peter 1:18-19...
Deut. 18:15	May 9	John 2:5
Deut. 18:18	May 10	Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 6:4; John 6:14...
Deut. 18:18	May 11	Heb. 3, 5, 8, 9; Jude 9; Rev.15:3...
Deut. 21:22-23	May 12	Galatians 3:13
Deut. 34:9	May 13	Luke 2:40; Revelation 19:11...
Joshua 6:4-5	May 16	Revelation 8:1-6
1Samuel 2:26	May 21	Luke 2:52
1Samuel 2:35	May 22	Hebrews 7:1-17
1Sam 30:23-25	May 25	Matthew 20:1-6
2Samuel 5:4-9	May 26	Matthew 5:34-35
2Sam. 6:21-22	May 27	Matthew 27:28-35
1Ki. 7:15-22	Jun 5	Revelation 3:12
1Kings 8:27	Jun 6	Revelation 22:3-4
1Ki. 18:36-37	June 8	Matthew 17:11; Luke 1:16
1Ki. 18:43-44	June 9	Revelation 14:14
1Kings 19:1-2	Jun 10	Revelation 13:13-15
2Kings 2:9-10	Jun11	Matthew 28:19-20
1Chr. 17:12-14	Jun 15	Luke 1:32-33
Ezra 5:2	Jun 17	Revelation 18:1-10
Neh. 13:1-3	Jun 19	Revelation 21:7, 22:15...
Esther 3:8	Jun 20	Revelation 12:17
Job 2:3	Jun 21	Matthew 5:28, 23:37...
Job 19:25-27	Jun 22	1Thess 4:16-17; Titus 2:13-14...
Psalm 2:1-2	Jun 24	Matt. 12:14, 26:4; John 11:53...
Psalm 2:8-9	Jun 26	Revelation 19:15
Psalm 22:1	Jun 29	Matthew 27:46
Psalm 22:7-8	Jun 30	Matthew 27:41-43
Psalm 22:15	Jul 1	John 19:28
Psalm 22:16	Jul 2	Luke 24:39; John 20:25...
Psalm 23:1-4	Jul 5	John 10:11-16; Heb. 13:20...
Psalm 24:7-10	Jul 6	Revelation 5:6-14

Psalm 31:5-13	Jul 7	Luke 23:46
Psalm 40:6-8	Jul 9	Matthew 6:10, 26:42
Ps. 68:17-18	Jul 12	Ephesians 4:8
Ps. 69:20-21	Jul 15	Matthew 27:34
Ps. 73 :16-17	Jul 18	Hebrews 4:14-10:25
Prov. 4:7-9	Jul 25	Luke 2:52; 1Cor. 1:24...
Eccl. 12:9-10	Jul 26	Matthew 7:29, 13:54
Song. 5:3-6	Jul 27	Revelation 3:20
Isaiah 1:18	Jul 28	Revelation 7:9-13
Isaiah 2:19-21	Jul 29	Revelation 6:12-17
Isaiah 9:1-2	Aug 2	John 8:12
Isaiah 9:6	Aug 3	John 18:37
Isaiah 9:6	Aug 4	John 14:16
Isaiah 9:6	Aug 7	John 14:27
Isaiah 11:1-3	Aug 10	Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6
Isa. 22:20-22	Aug 13	Acts 4:12; Revelation 1:3, 3:7
Isaiah 33:22	Aug 18	John 5:22, 27; 1John 2:1; Rev. 17:14
Isaiah 33:24	Aug 19	Matthew 9:1-8, 11:5; Luke 4:40
Isaiah 35:3-4	Aug 21	Luke 21:26; 1Thessalonians 5:11...
Isaiah 35:5-7	Aug 22	Matthew 11:5; Revelation 21:5...
Isaiah 35:10	Aug 23	Revelation 21:3-4
Isaiah 40:4-5	Aug 25	Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; Luke
Isa. 40:10-11	Aug 26	John 10:1-14
Isaiah 41:14	Aug 27	Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; Titus 2:14
Isaiah 42:1	Aug 28	Matthew 3:17
Isaiah 42:5-7	Sep 1	Luke 4:18; Acts 26:23
Isa. 43:14-15	Sep 2	Mark 1:24
Isaiah 44:6-8	Sep 3	Matt. 16:18; 1Cor. 10: 4; Titus 2:14...
Isa. 45:22-23	Sep 5	Philippians 2:10-11; Rev 4-5
Isa. 48:12-13	Sep 6	Hebrews 1
Isaiah 49:5-6	Sep7	Luke 2:32; Matthew 10:6, 15:24
Isa. 49:15-16	Sep 8	John 20:25
Isaiah 49:26	Sep 9	Galatians 4:5; Titus 1:3-4, 2:14
Isaiah 50:6	Sep 11	Matthew 5:39-41
Isaiah 50:7	Sep 12	Luke 9:51
Isaiah 50:8	Sep 13	John 8:46; Romans 8:33-35
Isaiah 52:7	Sep 15	Matthew 11:5; Romans 10:15
Isaiah 52:13	Sep 17	Philippians 2:5-11
Isaiah 54:5	Oct 3	Matt. 25; John 14:3; Rev. 19:7-9...
Isaiah 59:20	Oct 8	Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2...
Isa. 60:19-20	Oct 9	Revelation 21:22-27
Isaiah 61:8	Oct 12	Hebrews 13:20
Isaiah 63:3-5	Oct 13	Revelation 14:19-20
Isa. 66:15-16	Oct 14	2Peter 3:5-7
Isa. 66:22-23	Oct 15	Revelation 21:3-4, 24

Jeremiah 8:20	Oct 16	Luke 13:34-35
Jer. 20:10	Oct19	Luke 11:53-54
Jer. 26:11	Oct 21	Matthew 27:4; John 8:53,10:20...
Lam 1:12	Oct 24	Matthew 26:38
Lam. 4:20	Oct 25	Luke 24:21
Ezekiel 1:4	Oct 26	Revelation 4:1-3
Ezekiel 1:26	Oct 27	Revelation 4, 5
Ezekiel 2:3-5	Oct 28	Luke 9:22, 19:10, 24:7...
Ezek. 34:23-24	Oct 29	John 10:1-16...
Daniel 2:44-45	Oct 30	Revelation 6:15-17
Daniel 2:47	Oct 31	Revelation 19:11-16
Daniel 7:13-14	Nov 2	Matthew 26:64; Revelation 14:14
Daniel 10:5-6	Nov 13	Revelation 1:14-5
Daniel 12:1	Nov 15	Acts 7:55-56; Revelation 12:7
Hosea 6:1-2	Nov 17	Luke 13:32; 1Corinthians 15:4...
Hosea 11:1	Nov 18	Matt. 2:14-15; Romans 8:30; Heb. 1:6
Hosea 13:4	Nov 19	Acts 4:12
Joel 3:12-13	Nov 20	John 5:22-27; Revelation 14:14-20
Joel 3:14-16	Nov 21	Revelation 14:6-7
Jonah 2:6	Nov 24	Matthew 12:40
Micah 5:1	Nov 26	Struck on the cheek
Nahum 1:15	Nov 30	2Corinthians 6:15
Habakkuk 2:3	Dec 1	2Peter 3:4
Zeph. 1:14-16	Dec 3	Revelation 6:15-17, 22:20
Zeph. 3:14-17	Dec 4	Luke 2:10-14
Zech. 2:10-11	Dec 7	Revelation 3:11, 21:3
Zechariah 3:2	Dec 9	Jude 9
Zech. 3:3-4	Dec 10	Revelation 3:5, 7:14-15
Zech. 11:1-3	Dec 14	Luke 19:28-44
Zech. 11:7-10	Dec 15	Revelation 22:11
Zech. 13:6	Dec 19	Zechariah 11:12-13:7
Zech. 14:4-5	Dec 21	Acts 1:11; 1Thessalonians 4:16
Zech. 14:8	Dec 22	John 7:38, 19:33-35
Zech. 14:9	Dec 23	Acts 4:12; Philippians 2:9-11
Malachi 4:5	Dec 25	Luke 7:27

Other passages in which Christ claimed to be Divine:

Text	Reference
Matthew 9:15-16	The Bridegroom
Matthew 13:16-17	Blessed by seeing & hearing
Matthew 14:33	Accepted worship
Mark 2:10	Power to forgive sins
Mark 2:19	The Bridegroom
Mark 2:28	Lord of the Sabbath
Mark 12:9-11	Chief Cornerstone
Mark 14:27	The Shepherd struck
Mark 14:62	Coming in glory
Luke 11:31-32	Greater than Jonah & Solomon
Luke 20:17	Chief Cornerstone
Luke 22:70	Before the Sanhedrin
Luke 23:3	Before Pilate
John 4:26	I am He – Woman at the well
John 5:18	Equal with God
John 7:28-31	From the Father
John 9:5	The Light of the world
John 14:6	The Way, the Life, and the Truth
John 17:5	The glory I had before the world was

Other passages the NT claims Christ to be Divine:

NT Text	OT Text	Reference
Mark 15:28	Isaiah 53:12	Numbered with transgressors
Acts 4:25-27	Psalm 2:1-2	Kings gathered against
Acts 8:32-33	Isaiah 53:7-8	Led as a lamb to slaughter
Heb. 10:16-18	Jer. 31:33-34	The New Covenant
Heb. 10:37-37	Habakkuk 2:3-4	Will come and will not tarry
1Peter 2:6	Isaiah 28:16	Chief Cornerstone
1Peter 2:7	Psalm 118:12	Chief Cornerstone
1Peter 2:8	Isaiah 8:14	Rock of offence
1Peter 2:22	Isaiah 53:9	Committed no sin

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